R. Waldo Emerson

Susan
from
Grandmother

E. K. Tompkins.

Christmas
1915.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Daniel Chester French, Sculpt. 1914

R. W. Emerson.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

BY

O. W. FIRKINS

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PREFATORY NOTE

A NEW venture into a field from which biography and criticism have drawn repeated and ample harvests may avert the charge of impertinence by pointing to the fresh materials in the ten-volume edition of the *Journals*, 1909–14, brought out under the careful and tasteful editorship of Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes. Of this copious and varied matter the present work has made extensive use. References to Emerson's works in this volume are based exclusively on the "Centenary" edition. Essays and smaller prose compositions generally are referred to by title followed by volume and page in the "Centenary" edition: thus, *Fate*, VI, 41. Poems are classed under the general title *Poems* followed by the appropriate volume and page. The following abbreviations have been used: *Jour.* for "Journals"; "Cabot," for J. E. Cabot's well-known and admirable *Memoir; E. in C.*, for Dr. Emerson's *Emerson in Concord*, and *C. E. C.* for *Carlyle-Emerson Correspondence*. Garnett's *Emerson*, Holmes's *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Professor Woodberry's *Emerson*, Conway's *Emerson at Home and Abroad*, are referred to by the names of their authors, Garnett, Holmes, Woodberry, and Conway.

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The frontispiece is an engraving of Mr. Daniel C. French's masterly statue of Emerson which was placed in the Concord Public Library in 1914, and is here reproduced by the courtesy of the sculptor.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

CHAPTER I

THE CRESCENT MAN

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the first of American thinkers, was born in the third year of the last century, May 25, 1803, in the "parish house" of the First (Unitarian) Church of Boston, of which his father, William Emerson, was minister. It is the pastime of his biographers to trace back his paternal ancestry through many stalwart and striking figures, mainly clerical, to its first clear emergence into the light of history in the sombre and troubled England of the Puritans and the Stuarts. The source of the family's earliest distinction is one Peter Bulkeley, "Rector of Woodhill or Odell in Bedfordshire," a man of admirable scholarship, piety, and contumacy, who found the breadth of the Atlantic the only adequate symbol of the divergence between his views and those of the dogmatic and despotic Archbishop Laud. Bulkeley came to America in 1634 and founded in the yet virgin wilderness the town of Concord; later on, his race, in the person of a granddaughter, allied itself with the Emersons, a stock in the fame of whose heroism and genius the town and the founder were both to participate.

The race maintained its high tradition in the New World; and its unbroken record of worth and distinc-

tion for two centuries or more is as intelligible as it is peculiar. To the discipline of persecution succeeded the safeguard of poverty; in that hardy and frugal community, the conditions which make ability its own Nemesis had not yet come into being, and success could not emasculate the energies out of which it had sprung. The men were collegians, scholars, reasoners, but what most impresses us in the Emersons and in the congenial stocks of the Moodys and the Blisses which brought their affluents to the common stream, is the resolute stanchness, the decisive, almost imperious, temperament appropriate to a community in which the laymen were half priests and the priests were wholly and conspicuously men. The vital anecdotes in the annals of these families smack of determination and manhood. Joseph Emerson, great-grandfather of Ralph Waldo, prays each night that none of his descendants may be rich, and all but martyrs his children to the fervor of his zeal for scholarship. The excellent Samuel Moody, another great-grandfather, gives away his wife's only pair of shoes from her bedside, and pursues his backsliding parishioners into the alehouse on Saturday nights, and drags them back to decency by the collar. William Emerson, the grandfather, minister at Concord and builder of the Old Manse, was active in the encouragement of revolution, and was only withheld by the urgency of his parishioners from engaging in person in the fateful skirmish of the 19th April, 1775: they could not prevent him from dying a year or two later of camp-fever at Ticonderoga, where he served as chaplain to the Revolutionary army. Daniel Bliss, father-in-law of the first

William Emerson, stands out "as a flame of fire" even in the decorum of an epitaph.

One is interested to find in these progenitors of Emerson the combination of a strong individuality, bordering at times on the daring and the eccentric, with a great capacity and propensity for close and cordial relations with their fellow-men. Their wilfulness suggested the autocrat rather than the rebel, and their power of imposing even their peculiarities upon their associates was so great as to relieve them from the pitiful alternative of purchasing independence by solitude or social intercourse by subserviency.

The interest of this pedigree is undeniable, but its worth as an explanation of Emerson might be readily overrated. The point of wonder — and therefore of difficulty — in every such series is the step from distinction to eminence, and the wonder and the difficulty are much the same, whether the distinction be concentrated in the parents or scattered through a train of ancestors. The rise of tableland into peak is in no degree explained by the measurement of the expanse of miles through which the tableland reaches back in the surrounding country. Indeed, the procrastination of a race which for nearly two hundred years had gone on uniformly attaining power and consistently missing greatness might be held to create a presumption rather against than for the belated emergence of genius. Even if the great descendant be the synthesis of traits that have existed separately in various ancestors — and this cannot be securely affirmed of the Emersons and the Bulkeleys — the synthesizing force remains unexplained.

A ray of light is afforded by the curious similarity of moral type exhibited by Emerson and his two short-lived but remarkable younger brothers, Edward and Charles. But the natural inference — the inference that would be peremptory were it not impossible, namely, that the union of William Emerson and Ruth Haskins, the parents, produced that coalition of merits which at once bound these lads together and divided them from their forefathers — is refuted by the anticipation of this type in the person of the "fiery and affectionate sibyl," the aunt, Mary Moody Emerson, daughter of William Emerson the elder and Phebe Bliss. To account for Emerson, even tentatively and imperfectly, we must assume that the period as well as the stock was procreative, that the high result sprang from the impact of new forces in literature, philosophy, and religion on a race in which conscience and vigor had flourished for six generations. Even so the mystery which selected one generous stock out of fifty or a hundred others for the receptacle and conduit of this redemptive influence is inaccessible to our research.

The agreeable fallacy which regards a family as a savings bank in which profits accumulate and virtue and intellect are deposited at compound interest may be disproved in the Emerson case by the condition of the intellectual and moral balance in the years that precede the rise to opulence. The parents of Emerson are less individual than the majority of his ancestors. William Emerson, the younger son of the fervid Concord revolutionist and his wife, born Phebe Bliss, completed his course at Harvard College in 1789, became a clergyman

almost by racial necessity, was summoned in 1799 from a parish in the town of Harvard to the pastorate of the First (Unitarian) Church of Boston, where he acquired that kind of distinction which after the lapse of a generation is hardly distinguishable from commonplace. He was enterprising, eloquent, and popular, the sort of man whose name is, so to speak, indigenous in the minutes of learned societies, in the roll of subscribers to infantine reviews or venerable charities, in select but not modish visiting lists. The data thus far collected are for the most part honorable, conventional, and uninteresting: two points, or at most three, disclose the man behind the featureless mask of the scholar and the gentleman. He had — what is valuable in any man and almost priceless in an exemplar of the aggregated virtues — a vein of gay, capricious, self-mocking humor, which, we are allowed to hope, lightened his very deathbed with the gleams of its playfulness. The second point of interest is his unaccomplished project of establishing in Washington a church which should excise from its qualifications for membership every reference to profession of faith. The third matter is a score of arresting monosyllables, recorded by Mr. Cabot in his faultless "Memoir," which sum up both a character and a situation: "We are poor and cold, and have little meal, and little wood, and little meat, but, thank God, courage enough."

The mother of Emerson, the "pious and amiable Ruth Haskins," the daughter of Mr. John Haskins of Boston, was a woman who contributed much more to the welfare of her family than to the sustenance or enlivenment of biographers. She becomes clear to the eye momentarily

in her old age by virtue of a single plastic phrase in her son's letter to Carlyle: "My mother, whitest and mildest, most conservative of ladies, whose only exception to her universal preference for old things is her son."

The photograph in the "Journals" is hardly winning; the smile seems clamped to the face. The praise that is freely dispensed is rather zealous than cordial, and in the single epistolary fragment (addressed to her son William at Harvard) which has come to our notice she shows that inexorable elevation which it is easier to esteem than to forgive. These impressions are, however, misleading; or, at least, they comprise but half the truth. A single retort particularized in the "Journals" — precious because solitary — vouches for her participation in that mother-wit which seemed to encrust the very beams and rafters of the vivific Emersonian domiciles. The really decisive humanizing touch is in the words she addressed to the truant William and Ralph: "My sons, I have been in agony for you!" The arraignment of a society and a century is contained in the "bliss" which this disclosure of undreamt-of tenderness induced in the heart of the younger son.

A father who dies when his eldest child is ten years old (William Emerson's life was cut short in May, 1811) will but imperfectly influence his sons, and the keeper of a boarding-house, to which bondage Mrs. Emerson was reduced by the poverty that followed widowhood, is sometimes divided from her children by the very exertions which she makes in their behalf. The quickening force in the lives of the five young boys who shared the biting restraints and the high privileges of that humble

fireside was undoubtedly the father's sister, Mary Moody Emerson, a woman in whom that fusion of the religious, the intellectual, and the poetic instinct which became the index of the Emersonian breed had already made itself a fact. Her fame is slight, and, even in its slightness, vicarious, but it is doubtful if America can point to another woman of comparable originality and elevation. In spite of passionate energy and dramatic contrasts, her personality is hard to focus: it presents the same combination of vividness and blur which is found in the confused magnificence of the few published specimens of her iridescent and mazy rhetoric. We are told that the Calvinism of her forefathers had become luminous in the white heat of her enkindling poetic imagination, and that afterwards it had been consumed and turned to ashes by the very ardor of its incandescence. She was a rebel who rebelled against her own revolt. As Emerson himself says: She "in all companies and on all occasions, and especially with these darling nephews of her hope and pride, extolled and poeticized this beloved Calvinism. Yet all the time she doubted and denied it, and could not tell whether to be more glad or sorry to find that these boys were irremediably born to the adoption and furtherance of the new ideas."

She had in some respects the richest endowment of her race. In contrast with the nephew to whom she communicated so freely of her spirit, she possessed a Southern luxuriance of temperament incarnated in a Northern hardihood of constitution. She was a creature of extremes no less than of contradictions, and real as she strove to be, real as she indisputably was, her whole

character bore the stamp of the spectacular and the exaggerated. She had an eye which no weakness escaped, and a tongue which fairly substantiated the diatribes of St. James on the subject of that member. She hated an unreasoning obedience to custom to the point of being ready to replace it by an unreasoning disobedience; she thought everything complaisant that was not brutal, and the decorums fled at her approach. She had whimsies in respect to the wearing of her shroud as a day-gown which might have stepped forth bodily from the tales of a German romanticist or the memoirs of a French actress. Her often quoted counsel to her nephews, "Always do what you are afraid to do," with its plenitude of grandeur and its tincture of absurdity, illustrates the mixture of elements in a nature where the virtues rather rioted than flourished. Her career demonstrated both the worth of independence and the perils to which that trait is exposed in the absence of the intellectual and moral counter-weights, common sense and love, which qualified the self-trust of her illustrious nephew. It is difficult yet necessary to grasp firmly the fact that this nature which seems at first sight to vibrate between the ridiculous and the forbidding, which seems to owe its failure to be wholly repulsive to the saving grace which kept it half burlesque, was the channel through which ideals of self-forgetfulness and worship and heroism flowed into the souls of receptive and generous boys of whom one was the destined teacher of America.

That such an influence did not upset in the same measure in which it uplifted is highly creditable to the

sanity of the young Emersons. There were circumstances in their lives that might have aggravated the hurtfulness of any influence which their own genius could not countervail. There were five boys (omitting three children who died in infancy): William, born in 1801; Ralph Waldo, 1803; Edward Bliss, 1805; Robert Bulkeley, 1807; Charles Chauncy, 1808. They lived at the same time on the border of the empyrean and (if certain anecdotes be typical) on the edge of starvation. If they were saints by choice, they were ascetics by necessity. The father's death had cut down the income; five mouths are five mouths, though they belong to mystics and poets; the Harvard education which was epidemic in the family had to be foreseen and prearranged from the start. Destitution, we may suppose, was never imminent: New England thrift within, reënforced by measured but unfailing New England generosity from without, coped gallantly with the stringencies of a really difficult situation. It is said that Mrs. Ripley, a lifelong friend of the family, on one occasion found Aunt Mary trying to beguile the hunger of her youthful nephews by stories of Spartan fortitude, an attempt which, practised upon growing boys, confirms the reputation of that woman for intrepidity. There was one winter when Ralph and Edward wore the same overcoat to school on alternate days: half protected from the winter, they were still more defenceless against the biting social atmosphere which nipped their ears in the jests of pitiless companions.

The difference between their means and their station was the anomalous point in their circumstances. Belong-

ing by birth and education to the aristocracy of Boston, yet caught in the gripe of actual indigence, they had plenty of correctives both for their pride and for their self-abasement. A training which would have disenchanted the sour, embittered the uncharitable, or sensualized (by reaction) the fleshly, confirmed these lads in the cheeriness, sweetness, and spirituality of their inborn dispositions by shifting the centre of life from the outward to the inward world. In relation to practical values, the schooling was invaluable since it emphasized the necessity of material things at the same time that it diminished their significance. A man who as a boy has driven his mother's cow to pasture through the streets (or paths) of Boston is safe from the danger of viewing that variously related animal exclusively from the point of view of Virgil or Theocritus or the not dissimilar point of view of Troyon or Rosa Bonheur. A boy who has been solemnly rebuked by a scorner of trifles for the reckless investment of six cents in the taking out of a book from a circulating library and who has returned the book unread as an act of atonement for his prodigality may come in time to view a nickel as an illusion, but not as an illusion to be disrespectfully treated. A boy who has done housework in early childhood may blossom into an idealist in later life, but will remain capable of the severity of reminding more speculative idealists of the existence of the woodpile in the yard or the unweeded patch in the garden.

A fact of great moment to the outlook of the mature Emerson upon life was the virtual identity of his own aspirations and motives with those of the family which

constituted, in those early days, his society, his world. A nature as rare as his often finds itself a stranger in its own home, and learns the lesson of solitariness from its games with brothers and sisters or even on the mother's knee. Our cohesion with our kind depends largely on the mental image we frame to ourselves of the average man; the man we face at the turning of the corner, the *quivis*, the any-one-you-please, — in the dialect of the sidewalk, "the other fellow." Emerson pictured this man all his life more or less in the likeness of his earliest associates, and the presumption that man was a religious animal and that all other appetences are makeshifts and preliminaries fixed, and fixed finally, the basis of expectation. The facts that constitute the case for misanthropy, he saw — and stated — with a clearness and vigor which misanthropy could not approach, but he was so framed that no array of hostile facts — not even facts of his own discovery and propagation — ever disturbed his loyalty to his preconceptions; he could admit all, because he conceded nothing.

The Emerson boys, according to the oracular Aunt Mary, were "born to be educated." Ralph Waldo followed in this respect the traditions of his house, but his proficiency in technical "lessons" seems never to have been remarkable. At the age of three his backwardness in reading became the subject of regretful comment from a disappointed father. He passed from infant schools under feminine instruction to the sterner tutelage of one Lawson Lyon, and was thence duly advanced, at the age of ten, to the Boston Latin School, then in charge of the excellent Benjamin Apthorp Gould. Little that is

distinctive is preserved to us in the sparse records of his school life. Old schoolmates have obligingly searched their memories of the little Ralph's early days, and have shared the meagre proceeds with thankful biographers; but they are all manfully candid as to the mediocrity of the results. Judge Loring fortunately remembers that his compositions were "graceful," and Dr. Furness triumphs in the certainty that his reading of verse was impressive. Dr. Furness's name recalls the pleasant fact that two of Emerson's lifelong friendships — those with Samuel Bradford and the excellent doctor himself — date back to the semi-infantile days of Lawson Lyon: a certain woman-like daintiness and chariness in the hold of Emerson upon his friends was balanced by a truly masculine tenacity.

Mr. Cabot has printed in his "Memoir" a letter written by the young Ralph, at the age of ten, to his Aunt Mary, a touchingly plain and frank recital, sober but a little restive perhaps in its sobriety, combining formality with simplicity in a quaint partnership, and relieving the sedate with a touch of the florid. He mentions in this letter a private writing-school taught by a Mr. Webb to which he betook himself with theoretic regularity during the first part of the noon intermission allowed by Mr. Gould. His son, Dr. Edward Emerson, records his truancies from this distasteful writing-school with a certain quiet triumph in the opportunity it gives us for branding as libellous the charge that certain biographers bring against Emerson of adhering with undeviating and unfeeling regularity to the injunctions of the moral law. The seekers for infirmity may be

further comforted by the information that he was capable of angry thoughts when his brothers excelled him in the home spelling-class, and that he read with gusto contraband books in the hours of study at the Latin School.

A taste for literature was part of Emerson's paternal and national or quasi-national inheritance. This was the place and the hour of the sanctity of literature, of its elevation, as it were, to the rank of an inferior or ancillary religion. Mary Moody Emerson was, for her time and sex, profoundly read, and the lads' cradles were rocked to the sound of names which for most men are bound up with nothing earlier or more intimate than the encyclopædia or the college curriculum. They grew up in a domestic circle in which insensibility to literature would have been relegated to the same category with blindness or inability to walk. The taste for eloquence surpassed, if possible, the interest in literature, and Sunday morning derived a vivid excitement from the transit from church to church to hunt out the particular congregation to which Edward Everett, the idol of the day, was speaking. Ralph not only formed his mind and his ear to the appreciation of English verse, but wrote rhymes at this period with a facility which the laborious artist of later years must have recalled with envy. His knack at rhyme was said to have been "a matter of modest family pride"; readers of the available extracts will conclude that fellow-feeling was clearly strong among the Emersons.

In August, 1817, at the age of fourteen, the young Emerson entered Harvard College, an institution which,

after almost two hundred years of life, had not yet emerged from its own adolescence. Poor as the Emersons were, they never failed to command, in one way or another, the subsidies required for their intellectual progress, and the needful aids to the half-penniless boy were punctually forthcoming in the shape of the office of president's freshman (or messenger), the opportunity to wait at table (liked and yet disliked), and an occasional scholarship or tutorship. His services in the first two capacities paid his lodging and three fourths of his board. The family resources remained meagre, and the thirty dollars received as the second Boylston prize for declamation, which he had hoped to devote to the purchase of a shawl or other gift for his mother, was consumed in the replenishment of the gaping flour-barrel. Circumstances like these seem superlatively fitted to call forth the industry and earnestness of a grateful and conscientious boy, but, curiously enough, Emerson's college life, as we gather it from the "Journals" and the memoirs, seems pitched in the key of irresponsibility. Gay or frivolous he assuredly was not; but he acted as he could; he let things — more specifically, his own nature — take their course. In his pursuit and in his neglect of his studies, he was without system and without ostentation. For the fault — natural to genius — of not being a very good student, he did not even offer the customary apology of being a very bad one. His final rank was about midway in the class. He profited by the instruction of three or four congenial professors who were freshening the ancient routine with importations from the ways and means of Europe. He practised com-

position with diligence, won three prizes, two for dissertations and one for public speaking, and the office of class poet, after many vicissitudes, found a shelter from its wayfarings at his charitable door. There is no reason to suppose that he had any captious objection to standing first in his class, had the opportunity come in his way. Indeed, it is highly probable that he sincerely sympathized with the disappointment of his parents and tutors in the failure of that singular young man, Ralph Waldo Emerson, to live up to the expectations of his friends. But toward the curriculum — toward his college life as a whole — he seemed curiously passive. Harvard lay in his way, and his route as the descendant of Calvinistic ministers was foreordained. Whatever in the prescribed exercises suited his temper was gratefully received; the alien elements were gently, perhaps compunctiously, put aside. He had probably not yet shaped a rule or theory out of his instinct of self-reliance; he obeyed his constitution, and watched results.

Emerson's peculiar social temper, markedly gregarious but only half companionable, is manifest even in these early days. He appears to have been a quietly assiduous member of a small literary and debating society, to which conjecture assigns the flamboyant name of the Pythologians. Three little traits, Emerson's adhesion to his class in a temporary withdrawal from college, his occasional use of wine (with the undesired effect, however, of retarding the tongue it was meant to accelerate), his participation, according to Moncure D. Conway in a Conventicle club in which the parts, or at least the names, of parsons and archbishops were trav-

estied, should give a quietus to any suspicion that he belonged with the precisians or the pietists. A point of unique interest is the curious spell which a younger student, Martin Gay of Hingham, flung over a temperament, not highly subject, even in youth, to the romantic suggestiveness of personality. Emerson is cool and wary even in his willing self-enthralment, and is said never to have sought the acquaintance of the younger boy, divining perhaps that the same difference which made the bond might form the barrier.

Emerson's life, even in youth, lacked turning-points; the periods of his existence passed one into another by insensible transitions, or rather constituted one period, coextensive with his life. Of these four college years, from fourteen to eighteen, so restless and reconstructive in many lives, it is impossible to record a single definitive and manifest change. A certain passivity, which must not be confounded with intellectual stagnation — even a certain impassibility — marks this epoch of his life. His youth is almost more evasive than his boyhood. When Rufus Dawes describes Emerson as "a spiritual-looking boy in blue nankeen," — the tantalizing phrase which comes from an innocent friend, but might so easily have been put forth by a sly enemy, — he sets a real, if somewhat whimsical, image before our eyes. (It suggests without any intention and probably without any justice the avidity with which the admiring but distrustful and disquieted townsfolk lay hold of any social eccentricity on the part of the prophet or saint.) But nothing so clear as this is reported of the imponderable college days. Reminiscences help us to some image of

the half-inviting, half-defensive benignity which marked Emerson's bearing in the execution of his duties, and John Lowell Gardner, in a letter printed in Dr. Holmes's "Life," has a word that really helps: "A certain flash when he said anything that was more than usually worthy to be remembered." One thanks Mr. Gardner for his "flash," admitting us to the secret of those pregnant and fruitful activities carried on in the shelter and the shadow of that gracious stillness which an untutored or sardonic eye might have mistaken for quiescence. Even the "Journals" of the period hardly confute this error; they fail to be communicative even when they are voluble; they are mostly self-imposed exercises, sometimes essaying burlesque, sometimes grandiloquence (without difference of outcome), sometimes set themes that bring back to us the formal exactness of the academic quadrangle. Nothing in the contents of these early "Journals" evinces so much maturity as his perseverance in composing them.

The needier Harvard students were accustomed to fill the intervals of the college year and the gaps in their budgets by the practice of school-keeping. Emerson, among the other sons of the house, had succumbed to the ungenial necessity. Hatred of routine was inherent in a temper to which openness to impressions, the search for opportunities, was an attraction as imperative as the highroad to a gypsy. He could live willingly the simplest, the most domestic, the most unvarying life, if his mind were unhindered in its celestial vagabondage. But the imposition of a schedule drew from him perhaps the most violent invective which ever came from his pen

on a topic merely personal. He says in the "Journal" for December 15, 1820: —

"I claim and clasp a moment's respite from this irksome school to saunter in the fields of my own wayward thought. The afternoon was gloomy and preparing to snow — dull, ugly weather. But when I came out from the hot, steaming, stoved, stinking, dirty, A–B spelling-school-room, I almost soared and mounted the atmosphere at breathing the free magnificent air, the noble breath of life. It was a delightful exhilaration but it soon passed off."

The chafing is violent, but exhausts itself in half a sentence.

Emerson has the capacity for disgust which pertains to delicate tempers and the susceptibility to weariness which besets the power to enjoy vividly and keenly. His patience in the latter respect was now to be tested. His brother William, after graduating from Harvard at seventeen, was prepared at eighteen, as Waldo with endearing satire recounts, to "enact the 'grave' experienced professor, who had seen much of life, and was prepared to give the overflowing of his wisdom and ripe maturity to the youth of his native city."

He had chosen as the *mise-en-scène* of his benevolent omniscience a school for young ladies of the select circles of Boston, which he conducted, with oldtime simplicity, in his mother's house. The post of assistant, and, later on, the sole charge of the establishment for a year, was confided to the anxious and rather rueful Waldo (the family usage substituted "Waldo" for "Ralph" at about this period).

A French comedy-writer or, for that matter, our own Mr. Howells, could have educed a delicate farce from the embarrassments of the sage of eighteen, the scion of a masculine household and the nursling of a college for men, in his first encounters with young ladies whom sex and caste and years and even an aptitude for satire combined to render socially redoubtable. His admirations for his pupils, which he chivalrously recalls in an address made at their invitation many years later, and which doubtless might be compared to the fallings of snow upon wool, were not of a sort to temper his impatience with a confining and unpalatable task. He speaks of "miserable employment" and a "hopeless schoolmaster," though, possibly, the bitterness of these phrases voices the restlessness and melancholy of youth quite as much as his relation to the decried calling. Reports vary as to his efficiency in teaching; on the whole, one infers that his success was moderate. The "subjection" in which he may very well have held the class of minds with whom gentleness is authoritative is quite compatible with his self-confessed "vexation of spirit when the will of the pupils was a little too strong for the will of the teacher." In all such judgments a double allowance must be made, — an allowance for Emerson's own propensity for the superlative in passages of self-disparagement and for the proneness of his admirers to luxuriate in the same fault when the matter in hand is laudation.

The school-keeping was pecuniarily fruitful; the biographers do not help us to understand the legerdemain by which a profession ordinarily so niggardly to its ap-

prentices was made to yield in three years between two and three thousand dollars in actual savings to this unpractised young idealist. This surely entitled the "miserable employment" to some forbearance, and Emerson, who was, we think, in spite of his constitutional poise and serenity, a lover in his way of moods and their permutations, wrote some spirited and cheerful letters at this period to his former classmate, Mr. John B. Hill. They are more normal in their youthful gayety and satire than almost any other of Emerson's letters, — products of a serious mind certainly, but of a mind clever likewise, aware of its cleverness, and human enough to find no displeasure in the consciousness.

The Emerson household was falling in these years into that state of partial deliquescence which the migrations to college, the maturing of the sons, and the exigencies of illness are prone to bring about in the American family. The headquarters shift from Boston to Canterbury and from Canterbury to Cambridge, and the mobility of the individual units was considerable. William, the eldest son, went to Göttingen to study divinity, submitted the New England creed to the action of the German solvents, was advised by the facile and diplomatic Goethe to ignore his doubts, to temporize and conform, and returned to New England to remember nothing except his descent from the uncompromising Peter Bulkeley. He renounced the clerical vocation, and became a successful lawyer in New York; not emerging very often into direct view in the progress of his brother's life, he impresses us always as one of its real though invisible stays. The affectionate but feeble-

minded Bulkeley was to be transferred to other guardianship. Edward, after a resplendent career at Harvard, was forced to give up his school-keeping and his law studies, and to seek renovation for his failing powers in a voyage to the Mediterranean. Charles was now studying in Harvard. Meanwhile, the combined influence of ancestral tradition, of maternal wishes intensified and disquieted by the withdrawal of William, and of his own maturing character and ambition was gently but steadily urging the pondering Waldo toward the choice of the ministry as a career. He began his studies at Divinity Hall, Cambridge, in February, 1825.

To call Emerson's work at Cambridge desultory would be to deserve the reproach not of severity but of obsequiousness. He was interrupted and impeded at every turn — by weakness of eyesight, by rheumatism, by the menace of lung fever, by the repeated necessity of falling back upon the obnoxious resource of school-teaching. On October 10, 1826, however, at the close of what the elasticity of language permits us to call his studies, he was authorized to preach by the Middlesex Association of Ministers.

The approbation of the ministers, even in the absence of the usual safeguard of examination, is not inexplicable. The only person whose endorsement of the proceedings excites a little curiosity and question is the young candidate himself. How did the young thinker, who only six years later was to abandon a distinguished pastorate on a far from momentous point of ritual, and who only twelve years later was to convulse New England with the audacity and trenchancy of his heresies,

bring himself in 1826 to subscribe to a faith with which his accord, even in that early season, was undoubtedly imperfect? He copies into his "Journal" in 1823 his aunt's almost scoffing reference to some of Dr. Channing's views, though his own esteem for the man's ideas and eloquence is repeatedly attested. His brother's defection, moreover, must have deepened his thoughtfulness.

There were, however, many impulsions of an opposite bearing. The young man, whose years at this decisive moment numbered only twenty-three, did not approach the Unitarian ministry as an outsider or pioneer: the privilege, the investiture, was hereditary, and the act of taking orders was as seemly and comely in his view of life as the placing of a coping-stone on an edifice he had reared from childhood. The sense of a call, a message, had ripened faster than his hesitations, and he felt no doubt that an institution which gave a sincere and earnest man the opportunity of sharing his thought once a week with fairly serious and receptive auditors was a tolerable enough makeshift in a world where all instruments were unsatisfactory and almost none insupportable. It must be clearly realized that in questions of machinery, of the *modus operandi* of society and civilization, Emerson's temper was essentially conservative; his instinct was to grasp the approved tool, the existent mechanism: in a universe in which all forms were reduced to a virtual equality through previous reduction to virtual nullity before the face of an omnipotent spirit, it seemed finical to be nice in the comparison of ineffectualities. For Emerson,

moreover, the field of doubt was an outlying and subsidiary province in the empire of religion: from the calm of his basic certainties, he could view theological dogmas and disputes with the detached interest with which a capitalist, secure of his millions, might watch the dubious investment of a few stray thousands in a backward town site or a brittle corporation. The great amelioration which, in the time of his own parents, had swiftly and noiselessly transformed a Calvinistic into a Unitarian Boston may have encouraged him to hope for a greater plasticity in the new faith than the immediate future was to justify, and he may have shrewdly divined that Unitarianism was a craft which it was easier to steer from within than to tow from without.

The seriousness of his purpose and the extraordinary justice of his self-analysis (a justice equally proof against the two opposite seductions of self-praise and self-disparagement) are clearly shown in the "Journal" for April 24, 1824, in a passage in which we avail ourselves of Mr. Cabot's judicious abridgment, restoring, however, the original punctuation: —

"I am beginning my professional studies. In a month I shall be legally a man, and I deliberately dedicate my time, my talents, and my hopes to the church. Man is an animal that looks before and after; and I should be loth to reflect at a remote period that I took so solemn a step in my existence without some careful examination of my past and present life. . . .

"I cannot dissemble that my abilities are below my ambition. And I find that I judged by a false criterion when I measured my powers by my ability to under-

stand and to criticise the intellectual character of another. . . . I have, or had, a strong imagination, and consequently a keen relish for the beauties of poetry. . . . My reasoning faculty is proportionably weak: nor can I ever hope to write a Butler's Analogy or an 'Essay' of Hume. Nor is it strange that with this confession I should choose theology. For, the highest species of reasoning upon divine subjects is rather the fruit of a sort of moral imagination, than of the 'Reasoning Machines,' such as Locke and Clarke and David Hume."

The manhood in this passage is far from merely legal. The pages that follow contain much of interest, in particular the characteristic lament for the want of what he calls *bottom*, that is, of constitution or native self-command.

It was the defect of physical rather than moral bottom that constituted the immediate source of anxiety to the friends of the newly "approbated" minister. Disease and teaching, his two distinctive — one might almost say his two favorite — aversions, had reduced him by the close of 1826 to a condition which obliged him to yield to the insistence of anxious relatives that he spend the winter in the South. He embarked in the ship Clematis on November 25, and passed the winter and early spring in Charleston, South Carolina, and in St. Augustine, Florida. A single brief sentence in a letter to William condenses vividly enough the whole spirit of his sojourn in the historic Spanish town. "I stroll on the sea-beach and drive a green orange over the sand with a stick." Emerson shows the half-deprecating, half-condescending interest which he was wont

to concede to the sights of travel, and the sluggishness of the old-time city finds a fit counterpart in the invalid's sauntering quiescence. His letters record richly comic facts with a pensive nonchalance. One notes with interest that, in these early years and in his invalid's detachment, the future champion of John Brown and denouncer of Daniel Webster was able to record without indignation, as a mere freak of psychology, the fact that a meeting of the Bible Society and a slave auction were conducted within earshot of each other at the same date and hour.

He formed, on this trip, a curious — not to say a rococo — friendship with a planter in Tallahassee which came back years later to his mind when he was casting about for an illustration of the "best society" with which to garnish the pages of "Society and Solitude." The planter's name was Achille Murat, son of Joachim Murat, sometime King of Naples, and between the Latin glamour and the Napoleonic halo, the flavor of chivalric courtesy and a dozen or so clangorous lines of Byron which had left martial reverberations in Emerson's ears, his conquest of the austere young Northerner was complete. His atheism or agnosticism seems only to have solidified the friendship. "I love and honour this intrepid doubter," says the reserved descendant of the Puritans. A gentlemanly and thoughtful letter of Murat's, reprinted in the "Journals," is very droll in its mixture of deftness and crudity in the use of English, but evinces no intellectual power of a grade in the least commensurate with Emerson's.

He returned to Massachusetts in June, 1827, with

some improvement in weight and in spirits, but still suffering from a "villain stricture" in the right side of the chest. He preached intermittently and dispersedly, took lodgings at Divinity Hall again, nursed himself, indulged himself, derided himself, and showed, in some whimsical pages of the "Journals," those deeper and richer temperamental markings which so curiously streaked and flecked the sobriety of his native constitution.

"It is a peculiarity (I find by observation upon others) of humour in me, my strong propensity for strolling. I deliberately shut up my books in a cloudy July noon, put on my old clothes and old hat and slink away to the whortleberry bushes and slip with the greatest satisfaction into a little cowpath where I am sure I can defy observation. This point gained, I solace myself for hours with picking blueberries and other trash of the woods, far from fame, behind the birch-trees. I seldom enjoy hours as I do these. I remember them in winter; I expect them in spring. I do not know a creature that I think has the same humour, or would think it respectable. Yet the friend, the *anteros*, whom I seek through the world, now in cities, now in wilderness, now at sea, will know the delight of sauntering with the melancholy Jaques."

We have here, of course, no approach to the frolic of Dickens, the swagger of Lamb, or the exuberance of Carlyle; but the Addisonian or Goldsmithian savor is clearly perceptible; he attains aroma, if not raciness. The sauntering itself is highly suggestive; in this lane between life and death in which he paced casually at this

period, he half courts the neighborhood of the next world as a dispensation from the responsibilities of this. He has the suspicious fortitude of the child who welcomes sickness in view of the expected holiday. He escapes from the writing-desk, he loiters in the halls, he wooes the society of laughers, — a trait almost peculiar to this freakish parenthesis in his life.

There is, however, in the general attitude, a whimsical despair which is characteristically and abidingly Emersonian. His humor consists largely in a comic disclaimer of responsibility for his delinquent and incorrigible self. He had certain temperamental defects, hesitations, embarrassments, *gaucheries*, and the gravity of these delinquencies was emphasized by the nearness of brothers who abounded in the complementary virtues. He carried through life a feeling of forlornness and penury, but he also felt entitled to claim for himself the indulgence and humorous allowance which humanity concedes to the hopeless case. There was a kind of sanative limpness in his constitution at certain times which permitted him to lighten demands and to avert strains which proved too great for the trembling nervous equipoise of his high-strung younger brothers. He spoke gratefully of a certain *silliness* with which a benign Providence had tempered his intellectual frame, and thought his "sluggish" manner, his "embarrassed and ragged," or what he even chose to term his "flippant," speech a *caput mortuum*, a ballast, " as things go, a defence."

The hazards of life in the Emerson household in the first thirty years were magnificent and terrible. To speak rather floridly, it was a game for high stakes in

which the prize was immortality, and the forfeit imbecility or death. The elder brother, by firmness of constitution and the want perhaps of authentic genius, was placed in a measure *hors de combat:* Edward, Charles, and Bulkeley paid the forfeit; Waldo drew the immortality. The Emersons, to re-apply a figure in "Society and Solitude," belonged to that class of metals which require to be kept under naphtha because they ignite and consume in the air even at ordinary temperatures; the naphtha in Waldo's case was the "silliness."

The value of this half-simple, half-adroit management of his capacities, both corporal and mental, was to be tragically illustrated in the breakdown of Waldo's younger brother, nearest to him in age and in feeling, in the middle of 1828. Edward Bliss Emerson was one of those marvellous creatures the lustre of whose gifts is rivalled by their solidity, who impress the profound in the same degree in which they dazzle the superficial. At Harvard he had not only distanced all his competitors; he had virtually suspended competition. He had the gifts which would have won honor in ancient Athens, — beauty, eloquence, and social charm, yet he was possessed of a noble humility which appraised his brother Waldo in these terms: "The real lion of the tribe of Judah is at home." His energy was, in his warier brother's deprecating phrase, "preternatural," and the variety of incidental tasks which he combined with the study of law in Daniel Webster's office broke down his always uncertain health, and ended in the summer of 1828 in two brief but crippling paroxysms of insanity. The lifting of the mental cloud left his health and energy

lastingly impaired; a clerkship in a commercial house in Porto Rico offered a poor salve to his baffled hopes; and an exile, borne, as it would seem, with gentle fortitude, was ended by his death in that island in 1834.

For the two years between the end of 1826 and the beginning of 1829, Emerson's position had been highly mortifying. He had virtually loafed away two years at precisely that period of life when the charge of inaction is most galling to a spirited and sensitive young man. He had been the victim — almost the butt — of a debilitating but not prostrating illness which supplied him, in relation to his inactivity, with the best of reasons but the least forcible of pleas. The beginning of 1829 was to be marked by a sudden shift of fortune, and March of that year was to find him strengthened in health, the holder of an advantageous pastorate, and a lover happily betrothed. The circumstances of the latter event have a special claim to be set down; the loves of great men, like their pleasantries, are dear to the multitude, because they remove, for the time being and in semblance, at least, the barrier of superiority.

In December, 1827, Emerson, preaching at Concord, New Hampshire, first met the young Ellen Tucker, daughter of a Boston merchant then dead, and living in Concord with her mother and stepfather, Colonel W. A. Kent. She was sixteen and very beautiful "by universal consent" (as he curiously remarks, as if a referendum were germane to the case), and the first impression was remarkable; but the speedy end of his visit suspended the growth of the feeling. Unfortunately — or, rather, fortunately in this instance — the curative vir-

tues of absence, like those of total abstinence in other forms, depend for their effect on an unbroken adherence to the regimen. A year later, in December, 1828, the "presumptuous man" hazarded another visit to the "dangerous neighborhood," on a journey undertaken for the benefit of Edward's health. Allowing, then, for the year's interruption, Emerson's feeling appears to have been sudden, swift, an instant response of the imagination rather than the senses to the half-romantic appeal of an exquisite physical beauty, a delicious, dreamy, half-fabulous exaltation of the spirit. Such frames of mind may seem foredoomed to illusion, but the glimpses we obtain of the intelligence and character of Ellen Louisa Tucker suggest powers not equal, it may well be supposed, to her lover's, but capable of removing all sharpness from the inequality. She could write fairly clear-cut verse at a period when to be a woman and a poet was to have a double dispensation from exactness.

She bore with heroic sweetness the pulmonary complaint which cut short her life, and uttered these firm words on her deathbed, "I pray for sincerity, and that I may not talk, but may realize what I say," — an echo of Emerson, no doubt, but even as an echo significant in a girl of twenty.

The effect of the adventure on Emerson's mind is suggestive. He was bewildered, like one who suddenly wakes up in the midst of a fairy tale; he was courtly, holding his love off at an obsequious distance; and he was meek. Or, changing our figures a little, we might say that he was as glad and still and surprised as a

young child on whose shoulder a bright moth or bird has unexpectedly alighted.

The courtship was darkened by an episode of terror when the "beautiful friend" (as Emerson provokingly calls her) was prostrated for a time by an aggravation of the lung trouble. The improvement that followed was rapid, and the marriage was solemnized in September, 1829. Six months before, Emerson had accepted the pastorate of the Second (Unitarian) Church of Boston, originally as colleague to the Reverend Henry Ware, whose health was giving way, and, later, as sole incumbent, when Mr. Ware, on his return from Europe, decided to resign his charge and accept a divinity professorship at Cambridge. He was happy in both of his new relationships, shyly, almost forebodingly, happy. In a letter to his aunt he dwells on the strangeness of prosperity, and is half inclined to view it with the distrust appropriate to strangers. His optimism was now meeting the unwonted test of good fortune. The melancholy, or rather pensiveness, of the note is singularly expressive of the joy which it barely qualifies, and out of the momentary misgiving emerges the restorative sense of a boundless dependence on God and an "appeal to the sentiment of collected anticipation with which I saw the tide turn and the winds blow softly from the favoring west." The letter is only one of the many examples of his constant reference, and constant deference, to the opinions of Mary Moody Emerson in this transitional and formative period of his life.

The Second Church of Boston appears to have cordially appreciated the preaching of Emerson. There is

sufficient variety of report to make a precise estimate of the degree of his general success in the pulpit a task of some little difficulty. With two classes his appeal would be certain and decided — the small class of intellectualists who were alive to thought as such, and the larger but not perhaps decisively large class who were attracted to a personality of great and unique elevation. The enthusiasm which he aroused in this latter class was sometimes expressed in terms which can scarcely be read to-day in a Christian spirit by persons of masculine taste. Their adoration was none the less an effective support, and the combined weight of these two classes makes the hold of Emerson upon a Boston congregation perfectly explicable. His reasonings may have appeared maidenly to those who had formed their taste in pulpit oratory on the severe and geometric eloquence of Channing, and his plainness may have seemed austere to ears still vibrating with the silvery and rounded cadences of Everett. It must be clearly remembered that at this time Emerson had not broken definitely with the literary, any more than with the theological, tradition; his style had not yet matured either the cardinal attractions or the peculiar difficulties of his later English. His language at this time possessed that wholeness of tissue and evenness of workmanship which criticism sought in vain in its later and more powerful manifestations. No doubt he had in these days the manner which reassures the conservative; his nascent originalities, which never posed as original, peeped out with a gentleness which the untrained eye might well have mistaken for timidity.

One can imagine a comment of this kind circulating in the receptive feminine section of his sympathetic congregation: "Oh, he never says anything very surprising, you know, but he's very *spiritual* and very *literary* and very *nice*."

The relation of the young preacher to Unitarian doctrine may be, in part perceived, in part plausibly conjectured, from various self-unbosomments in the "Journals." His position seems to have been double, or, to avoid the doubleness inherent in that word, duplex. He still held to the traditional Unitarian gospel with its cargo of revelation, miracle, and a supernatural (not a deified) Christ, and he had framed a gospel of his own in which the order of nature and the divine voice in the personal heart took the place of the historic teaching. At the outset the second of these testimonies was the corroboration for the first; as time passed, the first became the corroboration for the second. The order of decay in the old doctrines seems to have had this course: they became, first subsidiary, then useless, then false. At this time the relation of Emerson to the two witnesses corresponded very closely to the relation of Unitarianism in general to the Old and New Testaments: both were valid, both were respected, but the second practically did the work and received the emoluments. The father takes the son into the firm as junior partner, and his own name is foremost on the stationery long after his influence has ceased to dominate the office.

Given an expanding mind in an inexpansive creed, and rupture in the end is inevitable. The only element of surprise in the Emerson case is the speed of its ar-

rival. A little caution, a little strategy, would have enabled him to satisfy his parish without paralysing himself. Men who are stirred to the quick by affirmation or denial will view variations in relative emphasis so wide as to have all the practical effects of a blunt "Yes" or "No" with an equanimity that nothing can perturb. The relation between Emerson and his parish was, in a distinct and living sense, a friendship, and neither side could be called captious or squeamish. Nevertheless, after a little more than three years, in the summer of 1832, we find Emerson parting from his church on the ground of his unwillingness to administer the Lord's Supper in the form then prevalent in the Unitarian body. After much debate and with great reluctance, the church rejected his offer to administer a commemorative rite from which the use of the elements was to be excluded, and, by a vote of thirty to twenty-four, decided to accept his resignation. On both sides the regret was sincere and the behavior admirable.

One cannot help wishing that the difference had occurred on a more dramatic issue, or, at least, on an issue in which the sacredness, or integrity, of Emerson's personality was more manifestly and indisputably at stake. It is difficult to withhold a measure of sympathy from Charles Emerson's indignant protest that "a torch of kindling eloquence has been snuffed out in such an insignificant fashion." In one sense, it is all in keeping; the emphasis on the individual soul is heightened by the preference even of its less clear and peremptory voices to the conservation of social interests whose value even the individualist concedes. Emerson was too clear-

headed not to have foreseen at the time of his "approbation" the disparities that were sure to arise between the needs of an original mind and the prescripts of an institution representing both an older and a more general or vulgar point of view. He must have resolved to overlook the less weighty of these disparities, and it surprises us a little that this resolve was insufficient to carry him safely over this ritualistic difficulty. He says himself: "I know very well that it is a bad sign in a man to be too conscientious and stick at gnats. The most desperate scoundrels have been the over-refiners. Without accommodation society is impracticable." An antagonist could not have been more trenchant. (The censor of Emerson continually finds himself in the humiliating position of owing the best statement of his case to the subject of his strictures.) We must remember, however, that minds at once liberal and conscientious often sanction in a third person a latitude which they could not stomach in themselves, and that, in the act of prevision, one's future self is virtually a third person. Moreover, we cannot choose our scruples in advance, and it is not always the largest or most formidable fish-bone that lodges in the throat and throws the system into perturbation in the effort at disgorgement. Emerson's conscience, with that unscrupulousness in carrying its point which is characteristic of that amiable faculty, no doubt insisted on the fact that his material interests were all on the side of acquiescence or compromise. We must bear in mind, also, that with Emerson the antithesis between individual probity and social usefulness could never attain the sharpness which it presents to average

men, because with him the social well-being was the effect, the metre indeed, of the faithfulness of the single man's adherence to his instincts. To sacrifice the unit to the commonalty was not to sacrifice the twig to the branch: it was to sacrifice the root to the stem.

That logic was decisive in the case is the reverse of probable. The upshot of the matter was this: Emerson felt distress in the carrying-out of the rite, and in time that distress became imperative. "This is the end of my opposition, that I am not interested in it. I am content that it stand to the end of the world, if it please men and please Heaven, and I shall rejoice in all the good it produces."

Words of unequalled loftiness and benignity, but their *withdrawnness*, their sequestration, is unequivocal. This, clearly, was no man to lead a parish. The favorableness of the experiment at the Second Church gave a peculiar decisiveness to its miscarriage. Fortune, in a whim of generosity, had offered the most sensitive mind in New England a pulpit in which the pressure of the institution on the spirit had been reduced to its practical minimum, and that pressure had been found intolerable. He had reason for thankfulness that the proof had been at once so summary and so absolute.

The young man was in a sense adrift. The pastorate had been relinquished, the maternal household had long since broken up, though its débris were partly reassembled from time to time at various points in the channel of the family life, and his own fireside had been darkened by the death of the young wife, Ellen, in February, 1831. His grief was sincere and tender, but it took the

form of a great mournfulness rather than of a poignant anguish. Intercourse with Ellen had been rather a celestial privilege than an organic or spiritual necessity, and even in the "Journal" passage in which, five days after her death, "the enchanting friend" is lamented in a spirit hovering between Greek and Christian, even in the lovely lines in which, two years afterward, her memory is recalled in distant Naples, we feel that her departure has left the man whole, the seat of being, inviolate. A priceless illustration had been torn, as it were, from the volume of his life-history, but there was no disturbance in the continuity or the character of the text.

His health, never definitively established, broke down under these accumulating strains: as Mr. Cabot says, "The thirtieth year, which proved fatal to Edward, and which Charles did not quite reach, was the critical period for him, too." A dream of the South changed in a few hours into "a purpureal vision of Naples and Italy" to which the sordid but inevitable initial step was the embarkation, on Christmas Day, 1832, on the trading-brig Jasper, bound for Malta, with a cargo of logwood, tobacco, sugar, and other West Indian produce. He spent seven months in Europe, reaching Malta on February 2, 1833, Paris on June 20, and London on July 21. Italy meant less to him than perhaps it should have meant to the possessor of a receptive eye, a cultivated mind, and an imagination not impervious to the exhilarations of romance. Emerson finds much to enjoy, but his enjoyment is rather the alleviation than the ground and texture of his experience. He is restless, uneasy, for

him perhaps a trifle querulous; he is singularly accessible to any annoyance, beggars, cheats, ciceroni, mummery, which may serve as a pretext for disenchantment. At the Capitoline Museum, "it is vain to refuse to admire"; he is not sunk to the baseness of an unresisting surrender. "I make a continual effort not to be pleased except by that which ought to please *me*." We are not to suppose that the young New Englander was a willing accomplice in the pleasures he underwent at the hands of those tyrannic and implacable cities, Rome and Florence.

This is, of course, an exaggeration: Emerson was no bigoted Puritan, as is clearly proved from his creditably unsuccessful attempt to view the Florentine ballet from the point of view of the mere artist. But he felt in Italy an element that was alien as well as foreign. He reminds us of a child taken to a fair villa where his eye is half lured, half teased, by a distracting abundance of strange and sumptuous objects and drawn back by an irrepressible longing to the consoling frugalities of his own nursery. Another point may be urged with some probability. Emerson had no doubt by this time perfected his method, or — to speak in the homely terms he loved — learned his trade, definable briefly as the extraction of the divine meaning from experience. Now the substitution of one type of experience for another subjected him to the same disadvantage which a mechanic would feel in the use of novel tools. He could find his insights in Italy, just as, if need were, he could read his Bible in Tuscan, but the process in both cases was burdensome. He says in one place, "An hour in Boston and an hour

in Naples have about equal value to the same person," but he complains in another context that long journeys do not "yield a fair share of reasonable hours." There was nothing provincial in his attitude. In his disparagement — or rather in his attenuation — of Italy and Europe, he held a brief not for New England but for mankind. Capable in his happier moods of vigorous response to mild stimuli, he felt more strongly the need of evolving the mood than of heightening the stimulus. While still at sea, on January 3, he had a "solitary, thoughtful hour" at sunrise.

> "The clouds were touched
> And in their silent faces might be read
> Unutterable love. . . ."

"What, they said to me, goest thou so far to seek — painted canvas, carved marble, renowned towns? But fresh from us, new evermore, is the creative efflux from whence these works spring."

If the journey brought out Emerson's ability to dispense with antiquities and celebrities among things, it marked, with curious distinctness, his dependence upon people. The eulogist of solitude, the upholder of the flight "from the alone to the alone," bewails his loneliness in parts of Italy with the pathetic sincerity of an American banker or merchant whom the rigor of fate leaves companionless in a foreign capital. The sight of a certain Lewis Stackpole in Rome refreshes him like the glimpse of "a young palm tree in the desert." The points of eminence in his first European trip were his visits to four distinguished men of letters, Landor (at his villa in Fiesole), Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Carlyle.

Emerson approached the masters gratefully but without diffidence, and bore himself in their presence with a suavity which never for a moment compromised his gentle imperturbable erectness. Yet his bearing in the four conversations, piquantly epitomized in "English Traits," has observable shades and discriminations. With Landor he is the alert and sympathetic spectator of a glancing and arrowy intelligence; with Coleridge he suggests the demure and correct young divinity student which the sage of Highgate not improbably thought him to be; with Wordsworth he is almost the American schoolboy straightening his face with difficulty in a situation where the claims of decorum and comedy were tryingly equal; with Carlyle he is the reverent and affectionate partaker in a sacrament of brotherly regard and fellowship. With Emerson the large traits are stable and abiding, but the flexibility and versatility of the minor attributes is great.

Landor was crisp and pointed, and, twenty-three years later, devoted a pungent commentary to the correction of the alleged errors in the published record of the interview in "English Traits." Coleridge was self-engrossed and homiletic, and the obliging and courteous Wordsworth, in his sober outgiving of conservative ideas, forgot, or seemed to the keen young American to forget, that admirers are sometimes discriminating.

The real satisfaction came in the visit to Carlyle, still comparatively unknown at thirty-eight, at his wife's lonely estate at Craigenputtock. No incident in nineteenth-century history is dearer to students of letters than the meeting of these two men, the supreme intel-

lects perhaps of two continents, the one still wrapped in obscurity, the other in the clouded dawn of his fame, under circumstances which made the encounter an abiding spring of happy and grateful retrospect to both. The hosts, man and wife, abounded in welcome, and the short visit, comprising but one night's stay, became not only the origin but in a sense the pabulum and sustenance of a friendship which ended only with their lives. The good genius which brought them together for a day benignly parted them upon the morrow; they separated before the inevitable dissonances had time to emerge; and the trusty Atlantic Ocean mounted guard upon their friendship. It may have languished a little in 1848 after its imprudent exposure to the hazards of renewed personal intercourse during Emerson's second visit to Europe, but a return to the old cautious regimen effected a speedy cure. The reader watches their friendship with a singular trepidation, which rises, at the time of their second meeting, into positive alarm, and breathes freely only when Emerson is safely reëmbarked. But it must not be supposed that the friendship was illusory because it was (or seemed) precarious. Each had sound value for the other. Emerson was first drawn to the prophet in Carlyle: that interest insensibly ebbed; but the magic that had deserted the seer re-attached itself to the demigod; the bringer of light had become the forger of thunderbolts. A primeval Titanic force in control of the anæmic art of current literature was a fact of inexhaustible fascination. The homage of Emerson moved Carlyle, not the less possibly for its total disjunction from allegiance; and if his younger friend appeared to

him in the guise of a pure and noble child, such a ministry — as exemplified in Emerson's little Waldo, for instance — holds no unfruitful nor unprivileged place among the forms of human service. No misunderstanding ever blurred their friendship: perhaps their very divergence protected them from disagreement.

In a tedious waiting for good weather at Liverpool, Emerson reverted to the thought of his friend: "Ah me, Mr. Thomas Carlyle, I would give a gold pound for your wise company this gloomy even[ing]." This friendly wish did not prevent him from taking at the same time and place one of those calm and mild but drastic inventories of stock of which a marking down — in this case almost genuinely sacrificial — was the fitting mercantile consequence. I quote with large omissions: —

"I thank the great God who has led me through this European scene . . . and has now brought me to the shore and the ship that steers westward. He has shown me the men I wished to see, — Landor, Coleridge, Carlyle, Wordsworth; he has thereby comforted and confirmed me in my convictions. . . . I shall judge more justly, less timidly, of wise men forevermore. . . . Especially are they all deficient, all these four — in different degrees, but all deficient, — in insight into religious truth."

There is something very curious and piquant in this quiet little assize or *Vehmgericht* in which a Yankee clergyman, unknown to fame and suspected by charitable colleagues of mental alienation, summons to the bar the authors of "Characteristics," of "Tintern

Abbey," and of the "Hymn before Sunrise in the Vale of Chamouni," and convicts them of deficiency in spiritual insight; and the kernel of the comedy lies in the fact that the situation was after all not absurd. The quiet young fellow had not overstepped his rights; the sentence was sharp, but the court had jurisdiction.

Room must be spared in the most frugal biography for a passage from the "Journal" at sea, conspicuous among Emerson's self-disclosures less for its elevation, which is more or less the rule in his deliverances, than for that permeation of loftiness with humanity which with him was the fruit of auspicious moments and fortunate combinations: "Milton describes himself in his letter to Diodati as enamored of moral perfection. He did not love it more than I. That which I cannot yet declare has been my angel from childhood until now. It has separated me from men. It has watered my pillow, it has driven sleep from my bed. It has tortured me for my guilt. It has inspired me with hope. It cannot be defeated by my defeats. It cannot be questioned, though all the martyrs apostatize."

There are times when the loftiness of Emerson is, in the literal sense, unapproachable, but the above passage invites one, as it were, to "moor by his side under the lee."

The positive debt of Emerson to his European sojourn was clearly small. It had provided him with one serious and enduring friendship, and with many interesting hints and particulars. A man who picked up illustrations everywhere could not traverse Italy, France, and Great Britain without enlarging his portfolio. But what

he acquired was illustration merely, not principles or points of view. Italy could not implant or modify the love of beauty in a mind in whom the worship of that element was already active and mature. France could not undermine a theology which was already *in articulo mortis*, or relax a moral code which had acquired in its own school a combination of elasticity and firmness quite alien to the self-indulgence of the Seine. At thirty years the impetus of his own character was too strong to be modified by impacts from without. His real debt to Europe was the ascertainment of its inutility. He had received from that benevolent continent a release or quittance for all his obligations to itself. It had demonstrated in his behalf the indifference of places; it had almost convinced him of the equivalency of men. He had cleared up his title to the enjoyment of America.

CHAPTER II

"FULL CIRCLE"

EMERSON landed in New York, October 9, 1833. For almost fifty years, he was now to lead one of the most quiet, uniform, and orderly lives recorded in the annals of New England. The question of calling was to be permanently settled by his self-dedication to lecturing and preaching, with the gradual transfer of emphasis to the lectures and the slow, almost dilatory, discontinuance of the sermons. The question of residence, a matter of much previous uncertainty with the Emersons, was to be set at rest by his removal with his mother in 1834 to the town of Concord, where the remainder of his life was passed. The question of household was to be settled within two years by his marriage to Lydia Jackson of Plymouth, his lifelong companion and his survivor. Even the detail of domicile was to be fixed in the same peremptorily final manner by the purchase of a house in Concord which was to shelter the family until it burned in 1872, and to be rebuilt, with the same nicety of conservatism, on the old site and the old plan. He was to establish a plain and decorous *modus vivendi*, the routine of which was to be interrupted only by the gradually widening circuits of his lectures which were themselves phases in a larger routine. He was to form, and cherish inflexibly, a few clearly defined friendships. He was to have a reputation for assiduity and

helpfulness with institutions so uncompromisingly respectable as the town meeting, the Social Circle, and the Saturday Club of Boston. He was to keep his mind and his house courteously open to the projectors and visionaries who enlivened, if they did not revivify, the New England of his day, but in neither exercise of hospitality did the guest become the inmate. He owned land and bought land, he owned banking stock and even railway stock, lived plainly amid plain men, avoiding all ostentation, even that of simplicity. A conventionalist would have hesitated to call his conduct odd, and precisians underwent the chagrin of finding his morality impeccable.

Let us examine the facts which contributed to the final settlement of Emerson's life, the adoption of the lecturer's calling, the marriage with Miss Lydia Jackson, and the purchase of the Coolidge house and permanent domiciliation in Concord.

Emerson preached as a rule every Sunday by special invitation in various places during the four years that followed his return from Europe (1833–37). Not till 1847 did his preaching finally cease. A call to the pulpit at New Bedford was prevented by his stipulation that he should be excused from the administration of the Lord's Supper, and from the offering of prayer except at his own option and initiative. His readiness to discuss the proposition is significant, and one notes with interest that the second ground of difference, like the first, originates not in a point of doctrine, where disparity might have been foretold, but in a point of ritual. The reason lies possibly in the fact that dogmas may be eluded, but rituals must be faced, that they are parts

not of the abstraction, belief, but of the reality, experience. Emerson's objection to meaningless forms arose less from the candor he owed to his people than from the self-impoverishment occasioned by the admission of futilities into his own life.

The decisiveness of Emerson's negative in this and the earlier instance is in curious contrast with his gentle and affectionate lingering in the purlieus or portico of the sacred calling which kept him an unengaged and desultory preacher for many years. Resolute as he was on cardinal points, there were matters such as church attendance, study in college, travel, the use of wine and tobacco, the publication of his verse, in which Emerson's temperament might be called, not vacillating, in the proper sense, but undulatory. He preferred a life broad enough to include not only a mansion for the principles but a playground for the moods. He knew well at what point it became necessary to contract the dimensions of the playground.

The uncertainty of the moment showed itself in the abortive project of founding a magazine and in certain lectures on natural history, geology, and physics, which he speedily gave up for the literary and philosophical themes for which his aptitude was unquestionable. This was the starting-point of the practice of lecturing, continued into old age, hardly stopped even by the decline of his faculties, passing from Boston where he spoke to various societies in the Masonic Temple, in Music Hall, in Chickering Hall, in Tremont Temple, in Freeman Place Chapel; slowly spreading through New England; reaching New York, and moving gradually

and tentatively southward, to Philadelphia, to Pittsburg, and, very tardily, to Virginia; following — perhaps in its fashion indicating — the march of civilization westward to Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois; crossing the Atlantic in 1848 and penetrating the reserves of English aristocracy, hereditary and intellectual. The addresses were single, or arranged in groups of six or ten; they averaged perhaps hardly twelve a year, though in 1860 twenty-five lectures were delivered in the course of a month. The proceeds were moderate: in 1847 he reports five hundred and seventy dollars for ten lectures as the maximum of returns; a little later nine hundred dollars is mentioned as the probable recompense of a three weeks' tour at fifty dollars a night.

The occupation was trying. Seen from the trammels of the pulpit, the lecture had once put on the illusive guise of liberation and opportunity. But freedom has its rigors, and there was a real anomaly in the adoption of a public career by the most withdrawn and secluded spirit in America. "I live," he says, "in a balcony or on the street." The danger of "charlatanism" confronted him in the very occupation that had attracted him by its sincerity. Emerson, except on the occasion of his son's death, always outsoars his temporary hardships, but one shivers inwardly at the thought of the exposure of that sensitive and refined spirit to the inclemencies of the lyceum platform. He needed the protective sheath of a supporting tradition, an elevated post, a prepared courtesy, and established confidence. The bareness of the platform was merely a translation to the eye of the moral penury of its historical and associative back-

ground, and the dependence of speaker and audience on each other was brought out with hard incisiveness and cruel relief by their common independence of external aids. Emerson's preparation was commonly in arrear, his papers were subject to derangement, and he was human enough to be capable, in his later years at least, of being made "miserable" by an infelicitous appearance. The temper of the audience was as incalculable as its size, and a sense of immolation accompanies the picture one forms of the presentation to the Middle West of 1850 of discourses whose very richness must have made them cheap. Travel brought its welcome stimulus, but it brought also hardships and indignities, some of which he describes with a surprising comic gusto that would be very diverting if it were not rather sad.

The preparation for these discourses was also a servitude. Emerson had the impatience of routine which belongs to all minds capable of great exaltations and depressions, and dependent for their beatitudes on the outcome of delicate and unforeseen combinations. To ask him for system was to ask a hunter to follow the turnpike. The *ranging* mind which made him a second-rate college student, a reluctant or hesitant writer of books, — "the cardinal fault," as he too harshly calls it, "of intellectual dissipation," — made the digestion of a lecture out of the "Journals" a burden and an anxiety. The contrast between the fickleness of moods and the fixity of engagements extorts an outcry now and then even from his stoic patience: between lectures the clock always ticks too fast.

The specification of these frictions was peremptory, but

the effect must be tempered by the reflection that they were the price which Emerson paid for the satisfaction of a great moral need — the need of self-unbosomment. The pursuit of a calling for forty consecutive years on the part of a man for whom the correspondence between feeling and deed is the first law of conduct is a quite sufficing answer to the supposition of unfitness. The lecture system solved a problem, though the device was awkward and costly. Even the irksome and mortifying travel had its recompense: he speaks gratefully of "the good he finds in the correction which every journey makes to my exaggeration, in the plain facts I get, and in the rich amends I draw for many listless days in the dear society of here and there a great heart."

The second decisive step of these quietly fruitful years was his marriage, on September 14, 1835, to Miss Lydia Jackson of Plymouth, sister of the distinguished scientist, Dr. Charles T. Jackson. The first name was changed from "Lydia" to "Lidian," at Emerson's request, to avoid the hiatus between "Lydia" and the new surname, a fact worth noting in a man whose want of ear has furnished occupation to so many critics. The tread of this lady through the unfrequented paths of Emerson's domestic life is so noiseless that only a rare footfall here and there reaches the ear of the questioning biographer.

The friends of Mrs. Emerson likened her to an abbess, and the face reproduced for us in the "Journals," calm, steadfast, melancholy, with still veiled eyes, would have blended fittingly enough with the twilight of cloisters and the vistas of columnar arcades. Emerson called her

"Asia" in half-playful, half-devout reminiscence of that ancient fount of rituals and faiths from which his wife had drawn both the name "Lydia" and the religious enthusiasm which reproved, as he thought, his own backslidings. Even the childish "Queenie," another home name, seems a playful obeisance. Mrs. Emerson, however, seems to have readily adjusted herself to her husband's peculiarities. One is glad to find her credited with the immortal epigram: "On Sundays it seems wicked to go to church." A casual speech or two attest her possession of that kindling wit that seemed to cling to the very beams and rafters of the Emerson dwelling. (No wonder, amid such sparks, that the house burned down; the marvel lies in its procrastination.) She remarked that the giving of an unaccustomed order in the kitchen made her feel like the boy who throws a stone and runs. Emerson quotes her less often than Elizabeth Hoar, and, of course, far less often than the oracular Aunt Mary, but he quotes her with honor, nevertheless. Amid the clamor stirred up by the Divinity School Address, she urged an heroic quiescence. When a friend said, "The end is not yet: wait till it is done"; she replied, "It is done in Eternity." Emerson is rhapsodic over this speech, but the reader hesitates; it is the touch too much, more suggestive of precocity than ripeness. She bore herself with admirable generosity in one of the shrewdest tests of a wife's forbearance, the husband's wish to reverse common usage in the treatment of the domestics in the kitchen. She trained the children to attend church, while the father, it would seem, looked on in the favorite masculine rôle of disinterested spec-

tator: he is said, later, to have thanked his wife for her care. There seems to have been an occasional interchange of parts. Dr. Emerson records that when, on a rainy Sunday, the mother had allowed the children to play battledore and shuttlecock, the game was promptly stopped by the displeased father.

These hints suggest that fortunate plasticity, or wavering ascendency, known to the best American households, where any strong preference on either side is apt to carry its point without either the exertion of combat or the humiliation of victory. Emerson, who could put the breadth of the ecliptic between himself and his nearest associates when he chose, was able, after twenty-four years of married life, to speak of his "Benvenuta" with almost the rich and stately homage with which a poet of Dante's time would have exalted the virtues of his lady. One feels in Mrs. Emerson the combination of an active force which could evoke for her husband all the conditions of a care-free and fruitful silence with a "wise passiveness" capable of merging itself, when need was, in the very silence it had wrought. She satisfied two main needs of Emerson in his house-partner, tranquillity and steadfastness.

While thus occupied in finding a vocation and in choosing a wife, he proceeded to give a third hostage to conservatism in the purchase of a house and estate in the town of Concord, seventeen miles from Boston, a gentle rural commune, nestling placidly in the lap of quiet fields and historic memories.

This little place whose glory, already endorsed by

history, was now to be countersigned by literature, was almost as deeply involved in the traditions of the Emerson family as in the annals of the nation. Peter Bulkeley, that admirable combatant and gallant fugitive from Archbishop Laud, had founded the town in September, 1635, and crowned his years of faithful service as first pastor of the little church by transmitting to his granddaughter the virtues which her marriage into the Emerson blood was to reënforce and in the lapse of time to immortalize. The national and family traditions had flowed together in 1775, when the fiery young minister, William Emerson, grandfather of Ralph Waldo, was barely restrained by his parishioners from active participation in the famous skirmish which his spirit animated and sustained. His infant daughter, Mary Moody Emerson, was *in arms*, as she liked to say, at the Concord Fight. On the premature death of the young clergyman, his widow (born Phebe Bliss), his pastorate, and the Old Manse which he had built passed into the hands of the Reverend Ezra Ripley, the step-grandfather of the young Emersons, — a man whose character, curiously compounded, as Dr. Garnett says, of credulity and sagacity, was to stamp itself with ineffaceable distinctness on the half-admiring, half-quizzical, and wholly affectionate scrutiny of his grandson. In the early straitened days, the Old Manse had been an unfailing abutment and stay to the precarious Emerson household; its hospitalities had blended themselves in boyish memories with the peace and rural charm of Concord; and in 1834 Emerson and his mother had gone to the Old Manse, at Dr. Ripley's invitation, to remain until

his marriage with Miss Jackson in the fall of the next year made a permanent domicile advisable.

The "Journals" for August, 1835, contain the following entry, briefly phrased, as was Emerson's wont in handling those chimeras vulgarly known as facts: "I bought my house and two acres six rods of land of John T. Coolidge for 3500 dollars." The estate was on the outskirts of the village and bordered the "Cambridge Turnpike" just where it leaves the "Great Road," on which the stages passed to and from Boston. The land was low, though sand and sun gave defensive compensations, and Emerson dispassionately calls it "a mean place," agreeable only in the forecast of added trees and flowers. While he shared in his remote way the Anglo-Saxon feeling that a man like an oak is safe and sound in the proportion of his commixture with the soil, he had likewise an instinct for the accessible and the proximate which helped him to decide in business matters rapidly and finally, to minimize drawbacks, and to make the best of his decisions.

The land in the rear of the house sloped gently to one of those Concord meadows which Hawthorne classed with others of their kind as constituting some of "the most satisfying objects in natural scenery."

A brook divided the meadow; to the south lay the cherished woods enclosing the delicate sheet of water which has dignified the name "pond" for all Americans; and to the north the peaks of Wachusett and Monadnock arose as noble terminals of the fair demesne of which his eyes held the suzerainty. His proprietorship in a grove of white pines on the near shore of Walden

and in "a large tract on the farther shore running up to a rocky pinnacle" was attested by evidence less subject to legal cavil.

The house itself was an unpretending, substantial, commodious mansion, quite free from what might be called the rhetoric of architecture, with no diffidence as to its predilection for right angles, meeting all practical needs with the efficient but not obsequious thoroughness of a New England housekeeper. The tulips and roses which Mrs. Emerson had brought from Plymouth took kindly to their new setting in the small garden by the brookside toward the south, and the philosopher's apple, pear, and plum trees grew with a willingness that bespoke the occasional resort to foreign aid. The whole situation, house, and mode of life suggested that halfway point between the austere and the mellow — like the apple in its equal remoteness from the lemon and the pear — which seems proper and congenial to Emerson.

One is half convinced that intellect is a thing apart from character when one sees how little the mighty intellectual advance of Emerson affected the primordial, temperamental New Englander reasserting himself in this domestication in Concord. The moral pioneer chooses a home in a town whose life was a rich loam of ancestral and national reminiscence; he marries a woman from Plymouth of all towns, he who disowned the superlative; he lives on terms of semi-filial intimacy with a Puritan of the old type, and enters into relations of deferential rather than condescending comradeship with plain country neighbors untainted with new ideas.

The hot radical may be indignant at this spectacle of the advanced thinker marrying in the most abjectly respectable fashion, rearing his children with the most pusillanimous correctness, and reaping the just penalty of his cowardice in seeing them grow up incorrigibly virtuous. But the paradox is no enigma. Men overleap or overturn the social order primarily because the social order as it stands denies them certain things — property or privilege or women — which they think needful to their happiness or the pursuit of their chosen ends. What they hate is not so much the evil as the impediment. Emerson felt no real impediment in the *status quo:* his ends could be pursued even within the frame of the unjust and illogical establishment. He accepted the tenure of property and the political order of his time, just as he might take the coach in Concord or the tramway in State Street without the slightest blindness to their inconveniences, but with a decent thankfulness to the stupid contrivance which helped him in its rude fashion to do his errand, — that is, to reach his audience and to say his word. In that *word* lay his subsidy to progress.

Emerson's secret, moreover, lay not in the discovery of new springs of value, but in the extraction of new values from old sources; his Arno was the "*second*" Musketaquid; his London or Paris was the Concord under Concord. A man whose purpose is to view each successive object as a receptacle and organ of infinity will find his advantage in placing himself in the neighborhood of relatively simple things and persons; the simplest objects are most susceptible of this dilation.

One can imagine a lyre or a vase expanded to the dimensions of the empyrean, but the experiment would be almost grotesque if repeated on a piano or a watch.

The Nemesis which overhung the Emerson family, and which had already claimed the lives of three children in infancy and the sanity of one son, was closing in these years around Edward and Charles. Edward died at Porto Rico, October 1, 1834; Charles at New York, May 9, 1836. Of Edward Emerson, no clear image is to be obtained; outline is lost in lustre. Of Charles Chauncy Emerson a clearer idea is derivable from a slightly greater bulk of data. In him the loftiness and magnanimity of which the supply in the Emerson household was unstinted appears to have been qualified and vivified by a mettlesome wilfulness and impatience, a touch of not ignoble arrogance. He added to these traits a youthful affluence of censure, capable of flicking even his brother Waldo, — always, be it remembered, in the high-minded fashion proper to the clan, — and a variable temperament to which despondency found easy access. The reports or extracts in the "Journals" show a wit and a command of simile commensurate with that of Waldo himself, but the latter insists on the poverty of Charles's written composition in comparison with his oratorical force. Had he and Waldo written a book in common, the separation of the parts assignable to each would have tasked the alertest criticism.

It is a curious circumstance that the fact of a man's intimate association with two persons endowed with superlative qualities of mind and heart seems to lose half its interest and worth when the hearer learns that the

two persons are his brothers. To live with rare persons remains none the less a privilege, and the modification of Emerson's life by such intercourse was, in all probability, great. He had formed ideals of the confluence of souls which the society of his brothers naturally failed to satisfy. But he combined in notable fashion the exigency of the insatiable idealist with an almost grandmotherly faculty of educing contentment out of everyday possibilities, and he had husbandry enough to extract profit from the very sources of his disappointment. His intercourse with his brothers had been broken and uncertain since he had entered Harvard, and, even in the periods of reunion, he was no doubt slack, like the rest of mankind, in availing himself of the always ready and never urgent opportunity. The regret for the partial use of irrecoverable occasions may have intensified the bitterness with which he bewails his own destitution in the final passage of the shining Dioscuri from his life.

"And so, Lidian," he writes of Charles, "I can never bring you back my noble friend who was my ornament, my wisdom and my pride. A soul is gone, so costly and so rare that few persons were capable of knowing its price, and I shall have my sorrow to myself, for if I speak of him I shall be thought a fond exaggerator. He had the fourfold perfection of good sense, of genius, of grace, and of virtue as I have never seen them combined. I determined to live in Concord, as you know, because he was there; and now that the immense promise of his maturity is destroyed, I feel not only unfastened there and adrift, but a sort of shame at living at all. I am thankful, dear

Lidian, that you have seen and known him to that degree you have. I should not have known how to forgive you an ignorance of him, had he been out of your sight. Thanks, thanks, for your kindest sympathy and appreciation of him. And you must be content henceforth with only a piece of your husband; for the best of his strength lay in the soul with which he must no more on earth take counsel. How much I saw through his eyes! I feel as if my own were very dim. — Yours affectionately, WALDO E."

Several points in this citation merit notice. There is the cry of dependence from the great champion and example of self-reliance. There is the studious and dignified elegance of style, which was the form Emerson's sincerity took on occasions on which, with the majority of men, the measure of sincerity is plainness. There is the innocent and affectionate relegation of the wife to a quite secondary place among the promoters of his well-being. There is the pleasing counter-evidence that the best and inmost in his character was not withheld from her sympathy. There is the emphasis — to be clearly marked but not vulgarly misinterpreted — on the devastation and dismemberment of his own life rather than on the relation of the fact to Charles (should he pity the invulnerable?). It should likewise be remarked that his sorrow experienced the difficulty — common to all human passions — of living up to its own prospectus. On May 16, he writes in the "Journal": "Now commences a new and gloomy epoch of life." But the "Journal" is not slow to resume its habitual grave cheerfulness; on May 19, ten days after the event, he is

regaining steadiness. By June 16 the sorrow already is resolving itself into the calm of spiritual philosophy. He tells us that when a friend has become to us an "object of thought" and "a new measure of excellence," when he has bred "a confidence in the resources of God by exceeding and expanding our previous ideal, it is already a sign to you that his office is closing: expect henceforward the hour in which he shall be withdrawn from your sight." The cool, speculative detachment of this unclouded, though at times rather misty, utterance must be counterpoised with the cry of bereavement in the letter to the wife before the compass and variety of the real Emerson can be adequately gauged.

The year 1836 and the month September saw the publication of Emerson's first work, "Nature," an anonymous essay covering ninety-five pages in the original edition. The sale was so dilatory that it is said that, at the end of ten years, the edition of five hundred copies was unexhausted. The failure of the first great work of an original mind is so much a matter of course that the search for reasons is almost supererogatory. Completeness, however, requires us to note that the reserved and abstract title, "Nature," was, in a very literal sense, unpromising; that the anonymity placed the essay in the same hapless category with the "hope of orphans and unfathered fruit"; that there was nothing in its bulk to suggest or advertise its real weight; that the novelty of particular views, which might in another form have proved exciting, was a good deal tempered by the strangeness and foreignness of the whole (a stone that would be conspicuous on the roadside is unre-

marked in a museum); and that the style offered real difficulties to the unprepared and unconvinced beginner. Mr. Cabot speaks, on Mr. Frothingham's authority, of violent attacks from quarters presumably orthodox, and goes on to say that the "Christian Examiner," the spokesman for the Unitarian body, treated the work "rather indulgently, as a poetical rhapsody, containing much beautiful writing and not devoid of sound philosophy, but, on the whole, producing the impression of a disordered dream." Carlyle wrote: "Your little azure-colored *Nature* gave me true satisfaction." John Sterling wrote: "I have read very, very little modern English writing that has struck and pleased me so much." These plaudits were doubtless consolatory; in both countries, however, Emerson ran no risk of that degree of pecuniary or popular success which would have prejudiced his claim to the title of philosopher.

The effectual retort to indifference is indifference, and Emerson's defences, in this kind, were impregnable. He would have valued influence, but hardly popularity, and his mind, in 1836, had much to engage it, beyond the reception granted to his first book. In May, Charles had died; in October, his life was brightened by the birth of his first child, Waldo. Emerson's attitude toward the little boy, whose advent appears to have revived his waning faith in miracle, is very characteristic, very pleasing, and very odd. It seems a combination of the shy, gingerly, admiring awe with which the child of three or four surveys its new-born brother, and the piety of some faithful henchman to whom the charge of infant royalty has been unexpectedly assigned. In

the "Journal" note for October 31, when the child is less than a day old, he is already turning his happiness into pabulum for his philosophy, but backsliding from high philosophy into simple happiness with a winningly human frailty.

"Last night, at 11 o'clock, a son was born to me. Blessed child! A lovely wonder to me, and which makes the universe look friendly to me. How remote from my knowledge, how alien, yet how kind, does it make the Cause of Causes appear! The stimulated curiosity of the father sees the graces and instincts which exist indeed in every babe, but unnoticed in others; the right to see all, know all, to examine nearly, distinguishes the relation, and endears this sweet child." The analyst struggles bravely for the mastery of the field, but at last capitulates to the parent in the use of the ensnaring adjective "cunning." Fatherhood unsettles the equipoise of the steadiest philosophy.

The naïveté with which the two philosophers or the two infants — either term seems incidentally applicable — began the study of each other is a spectacle of charming raciness — of a charm, indeed, of which raciness was only part. The boy was worthy to serve as a new spring of insight to the father, but it is doubtful if his baby Messiahship were worth so much to Emerson as the occasion he gave for the inflow and exercise of the simple human instincts. It is no mere intelligence or intuition that moans in the "Threnody," and, the higher and more ethereal a philosophy becomes, the less it can dispense with the checks and clews that are furnished by the ordinary sympathies.

Transcendentalism — a term which seems the instinctive effort of the shrewd public to balance the airiness of a philosophy by the solidity of its name — was a word that came to be applied, in the late thirties in New England, to the group of thinkers of whom Emerson was the inspiration if not the chief. The philosophic system to which the New England movement loosely attached itself by the long tether of this formidable word was the creation of Immanuel Kant and his followers and modifiers in Germany. The direct influence of the German thinkers on New England was confined to the few scholars conversant with their tongue, and to the readers of the sparing and miscellaneous translations undertaken in 1838 by George Ripley and his co-workers. The main sources of information were the French commentators and imitators, De Staël, Cousin, and Jouffroy, and the two commanding and hieratic Englishmen, Coleridge and Carlyle. The looseness and vagueness of the form under which the system entered America no doubt contributed to its plasticity and hence to its usefulness in this country. What the Americans wanted was not so much an itinerary as a passport. They asked from the Germans what their Puritan ancestors had asked from James I — a charter. The less they knew of the details of the patent, the more free they felt to pursue their own objects in their own way.

In Germany, in France, and largely in England, these philosophic dogmas had been the intellectual sustenance of the cultivated few. In America they had the singular and surprising fortune to encounter what is almost as rare as speculative originality itself — a current of active

religious life. A philosophy intersected a religion, and the philosophy, while it suffered a disintegration of its coherence and solidity, underwent likewise a vitalization which optimism itself could hardly have reckoned among the largesses of possibility. The effect of Christianity on Platonism may have been not wholly dissimilar.

The philosophy of Kant was a rebuttal of the doctrine of the seventeenth-century English empiricist, John Locke, that the mind is a *tabula rasa*, without independent knowledge, that its contents are importations from the external world by the highway of experience. Kant's main affirmations were three: that the mind possessed in its own right certain ideas or categories, such as space, time, quantity, and relation, which supply one factor to knowledge; that while an external reality exists, that reality including its highest notion, God, is inaccessible to cognition; that the voice in man's soul, the categorical imperative, is the mouth-piece of the spiritual order. These doctrines were developed and variously modified by Jacobi, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel.

The value of German theory to the New England thinkers lay mainly in the authorization it gave to the common tenure of two cherished and indispensable opinions, the presence of God as a voice in the individual heart and his existence, likewise, as an external substantive reality.

Unitarianism, in the gentle and gradual conquest which it made of Boston in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, had spared the dignity and office of Jesus to the utmost point compatible with the reso-

lute putting-by of the Trinitarian dogma. It had left Christ less than God yet more than man, suspended, as it were, between earth and heaven, a position, obviously, of unstable equilibrium. For deity as for kingship, there are no permanent half-descents; the impulse to complete the work is irresistible. The Unitarians taught that Christ was the mediator between man and God, and that his removal would leave man without access to divinity. But another point of view was clearly possible. If Christ stood *between* man and God, would not the removal of that intermediary leave God and man face to face? The suggestion was revolutionary. Immediate access to the truth annulled the necessity of revelation; immediate access to the power abolished the office of a mediating Christ. "The transference of supernatural attributes to the natural constitution of mankind," as O. B. Frothingham has clearly defined it, was, in the aspect it presented to the eyes of New England Unitarians, the most brilliant, the most sensational *coup de main*, which the history of philosophy reports. A prerogative so extraordinary that its operation had been hitherto confined to an individual and raised to supernatural dignity, was made at a stroke the property of the whole race and reduced to the same plane of natural-ness with hearing and digestion.

A question remained as to the faculty by which man was to appropriate these high truths. A new, a particular, faculty was felt to be all but indispensable. The understanding was a factotum, a man-of-all-work: moreover, its fallibility was conceded; its errors had wasted the oil of scribes and multiplied the shelves of

libraries. When a man, a nobleman, for instance, forsakes the common sanctuary and establishes worship in his own house, his first step is to appropriate a distinct room to that worship, and to segregate that room from the rest of the edifice. Similarly, when a man's religion becomes internal and private, his first impulse is to rail off a section or compartment of the mind to be reserved rigorously for the sacred purpose. Revelation was no longer documentary but psychological; nevertheless the old excluding and specializing instinct held its ground; a dedicated and exclusive faculty took the place of a dedicated and exclusive record. Nothing can be more curious than to find the infallibility once ascribed to the record reappearing, with scarcely abated precision and certainty, in the Emersonian tenet of the inerrancy and finality of the dictates of the "Reason." This "Reason," which is traceable to Kant, but which other men had cherished and propagated, became the stronghold and watchtower of the Transcendentalists.

In 1836 and later, a club of perhaps a dozen thoughtful persons, men and women, formed the habit of meeting at each other's houses for the informal discussion of such topics as mysticism, pantheism, personality. Nobody knew who first dubbed them the "Transcendental Club": the culprit observed a prudent anonymity. They included distinguished or eminent names: George Ripley, F. H. Hedge, Convers Francis, O. A. Brownson, C. A. Bartol, James Freeman Clarke, J. S. Dwight, W. H. Channing, Elizabeth Peabody, Margaret Fuller, Theodore Parker, Bronson Alcott, R. W. Emerson. Their common creed included little else but concentra-

tion in each man of the prerogatives formerly divided between Christ and the Bible; a joke which custom has effectually staled declared they called themselves the like-minded because no two of them thought alike. Their informality disdained a president; their organization indeed was the filmiest thread on which a set of meetings could be beaded. The whole movement of which this club was a part has a curious, hand-to-mouth, drifting inconsecutiveness. Even taking into account its two concrete manifestations, the "Dial" and Brook Farm, its history, which has a trick of evading its historian, seems a patch rather than a stripe on the sober surface of New England life.

Emerson's participation in this club as one seeker among a dozen others is pleasantly illustrative of a temper to whom contact with men was necessary in the same degree in which commixture was impossible. His relation to these scholars and thinkers was that of a soldier who speaks only brokenly the language of his associates in the ranks or the trenches: the barrier to companionableness need not hinder the comradeship from being perfect. He was co-worker with his fellowmen in the first of undertakings, the betterment of humanity through the individual, and he had so little of those twin vices, the pride of insulation and the pride of leadership, that he assumed gladly the posts of comrade and subaltern. He had his impediments which were likewise his defences; he carried about with him a *moat* which served both as irksome barrier and useful protection.

One other feature of the Transcendental movement

must be glanced at in this place. That movement was, in essence, a disclosure of possibilities; it showed vistas within man. Now the neighborhood of exalted possibilities, whether industrial or literary or religious, has always proved intoxicating to weak minds. Transcendentalism became for the credulous and the restless a spiritual goldfield which transformed New England for the time being into an immaterial California or Klondike, and, in the ideal as in the commercial Eldorado, the price, both in time and toil, of the utilization of opportunity was greatly underestimated. The opportunity itself in the New England case was rated too high. The newly disclosed possibilities were not themselves new; nothing, in fact, was new but the perception, and the effect of the perception in advancing the possibilities was easily overrated by the sanguine enthusiast. By a curious anomaly, faith in a quasi-miraculous intervention reappeared in the weaker disciples of a cult which had prided itself on the elimination of miracle; a slight change of attitude, a variation in method, was to effect the transformation of society by a spiritual legerdemain. The social direction which these aspirations often took was promoted by the interest with which New England followed the theories and experiments of French socialists, of whom Albert Brisbane, the disciple of Fourier, was at this period a prominent spokesman. Lowell's picture of these vagaries at the beginning of the essay on Thoreau has undergone and survived the ordeal of frequent quotation: —

"*Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile!* was shouted on all hands with every variety of emphasis, and by voices of

every conceivable pitch, representing the three sexes of men, women, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagus. . . . *Redeunt Saturnia regna*, — so far was certain, though in what shape, or by what methods, was still a matter of debate. Every possible form of intellectual and physical dyspepsia brought forth its gospel. Bran had its prophets, and the presartorial simplicity of Adam its martyrs, tailored impromptu from the tar-pot by incensed neighbors, and sent forth to illustrate the 'feathered Mercury' as defined by Webster and Worcester. Plainness of speech was carried to a pitch that would have taken away the breath of George Fox; and even swearing had its evangelists, who answered a simple inquiry after their health with an elaborate ingenuity of imprecation that might have been honorably mentioned by Marlborough in general orders. Everybody had a mission (with a capital *M*) to attend to everybody-else's business. . . . Not a few impecunious zealots abjured the use of money (unless earned by other people), professing to live on the internal revenues of the spirit. Some had an assurance of instant millennium so soon as hooks and eyes should be substituted for buttons. Communities were established where everything was to be common but common-sense."

The light-headedness of a community in many ways so cool-headed and so long-headed as New England is in itself a phenomenon worthy of study. It offers a clear demonstration of the danger of revoking the outward law, the law of custom or social expectation, without handing over the policing of the vacated district to the charge of an inner magistracy of equal authority and

force. The Philistine sense of the danger of too much religion — *to Philistines* — has its quantum of sagacity. It may be doubted, however, whether the diagnosis in these morbid cases should read, religious excess, or religious insufficiency. As knowledge is the best exorcism for the demon of knowingness, so religion, as the example of Emerson clearly proves, is the effective cure for religiosity. Emerson, indeed, sitting sane and quiet amid the headiness and giddiness which his own and kindred ideas had induced in a susceptible community, reminds one a little of the picture of Socrates in the "Symposium," drinking freely and with perfect impunity of the wine which had reduced his companions to imbecility or stupor.

Emerson kept his head, because experience had disciplined him in the slow growth and high cost of spiritual amelioration. He was too good "a man of business" in the religious field to be misled by the prismatic dreams and glittering promises of the get-rich-quick syndicates. The secret of Emerson was tillage. His gains were the fruits of industry and watchfulness, of patience and abstinence, of the steady pursuit of a high object dating back to his earliest years and to years long antecedent to his birth. He knew the costliness of that apparently cheap and readily improvisable commodity, — a state of mind. He was so sure of his own ground that he could safely dispense even with that attitude of scorn and contempt which is one means by which self-distrustful men entrench themselves against the assaults of the enemy. The practice of charity toward mania was a virtue to which he was constitutionally disposed and

which the conduct of his visitors maintained in a course of healthy exercise. Illustrations of this polite wariness which took each man's censure, but reserved its judgment, may be fitly postponed to the periods of the Fruitlands and Brook Farm experiments. Meantime we must advert to the biographical aspects of two notable addresses, reserving criticism for a later chapter.

The oration on the "American Scholar" was delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge on the 31st of August, 1837. It voiced the new gospel which the public called "Transcendental," and contained, in epitome, the bulk of Emerson's philosophy. The reception of the "intellectual Declaration of Independence," as Holmes called it, was cordial. Lowell hints at a slight divergence of opinion in a passage which as a whole confirms the impression of enthusiasm. He dwells on the "event without any former parallel in our literary annals, a scene to be always treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration. What crowded and breathless aisles, what windows clustering with eager heads, what enthusiasm of approval, what grim silence of foregone dissent!"

The growth of Emerson's influence reveals itself in the sale within a month of five hundred printed copies of this oration. One of these found its way to Chelsea and elicited from Carlyle the words: "God be thanked for it! I could have *wept* to read that speech."

The "Journal" for April 1, 1838, contains this interesting entry: —

"Cool or cold, windy, clear day. The Divinity School youths wish to talk with me concerning Theism. I

went rather heavy-hearted, for I always find that my views chill or shock people at the first opening. But the conversation went well and I came away cheered. I told them that a preacher should be a poet smit with love of the harmonies of moral nature; — and yet look at the Unitarian Association, and see if its aspect is poetic. They all smiled, No. A minister nowadays is plainest prose, the prose of prose. He is a warming-pan, a night-chair at sick-beds and rheumatic souls."

The little scene limns itself with a distinctness not usual in Emersonian anecdote. There is the question so justly purposed, yet so unfair, as if the organizations of poets should be rhapsodic any more than the organizations of wine-growers should be bacchanalian. There is the pleased smile so lightly won and yet, it is to be feared, so sanguinely and magnifyingly interpreted — Emerson mildly beaming at the success of his thought, which was perhaps after all only the success of his witticism. The meeting is thought to be the preliminary to the famous Divinity School Address, delivered by Emerson on Sunday evening, July 15, 1838, at Divinity College, Cambridge, by invitation of the graduating class. The occasion was customary and official, yet the students appear to have been the sole authors of a choice for which the authorities were, or claimed to be, responsible. The latter no doubt felt that Emerson's poetic bent insured his position among the non-combatants, and could not foreshadow "the sword in myrtles drest" which that mild adventurer was to bear into the heart of their unsuspecting conclave.

The indignation of official Unitarianism at an ad-

dress which reduced the divine prerogatives of Christ to universal human attributes is both explicable and pardonable. Christianity had freed itself with difficulty, in parts of Europe, at the epoch of the Reformation, from the superstitions and corruptions it had admitted under the sway of the mediæval Roman Church. It had shed these incrustations and infections only to fall under the spell — in New England and other communities — of the terror and ferocity which the malign genius of Calvin had distilled into the most humane of religions. The confutation and partial displacement of Calvinism was a service that gave the leaders of Unitarianism a claim on the gratitude of mankind, and the Christianity which they established was probably the most rational and benign form assumed by that religion since the first century of its era. They were justified in the hope of a prosperous future. Unitarianism, in New England, in 1838, had just seen the expiration of its first half-century (dating from the revision of the King's Chapel liturgy in 1785), and its establishment at Harvard College could be reached by a retrospect of thirty-three years. The domination of the childish superstition of Rome and of the inhuman theology of Geneva had been reckoned by centuries; a relatively rational and humane cult might expect much of its hold on mankind. The disillusion, the dismay and trepidation, produced by a remonstrance like Emerson's (equally exasperating, of course, by its vigor and its mildness) was embittered by the peculiarities of the occasion. The rebel had invaded their own purlieus; he had been cradled in their own faith; and had aimed his blow at the most vital and the

most vulnerable part of every denomination, the young recruits to its ministry. As Dr. Garnett says, "The shepherds of Harvard could hardly be expected to allow the wolf to carry off the lambs in their very presence, even at the invitation of the innocents themselves." In one respect the passage of time has justified their contention. Emerson's object in his iconoclasm was avowedly nothing more than a replenished warmth and vitality in religious faith; his victory, which was complete, has afforded a singularly clear test of the efficacy of his prescription; and the praise of its success must be left to those who find Unitarian or other fervor greater in our time than in the days of Channing.

Of the fitness of the new ideas for Emerson himself, there can be no question; the doubt relates only to the preparedness of the disciples. Emerson may have played the part of the man who puts out a modest wood-fire by throwing upon it too massive a chunk of *coal*.

Be this as it may, the Unitarian clergy proceeded to show that the fervor of wrath, at all events, was not extinct in their denomination. The "Christian Examiner," the official organ, declared the "notions" to be utterly distasteful to the instructors of the school and to Unitarian ministers generally, by whom they are esteemed to be "neither good divinity nor good sense." Andrews Norton, father of Charles Eliot Norton, the head, or at least, the right arm, of Unitarian polemics, met the address with an "emphatic anathema" in the "Boston Daily Advertiser." A year later, at the next annual address to the graduating class, his wrath vented itself in a retaliatory discourse on the "Latest Form of

Infidelity." In the debates of the "Boston Association" men did not hesitate to call Emerson "a downright atheist." The estrangement of Harvard was so complete that nearly thirty years elapsed before Emerson was again invited to speak within its walls.

Emerson's part in the ensuing controversy has been likened by Dr. Holmes to that "of Patroclus when the Greeks and Trojans fought over his body." Mr. Charles J. Woodbury (author of an excellent book, "Talks with Emerson"), not to be surpassed even by the unsurpassable Dr. Holmes in felicity of simile, compares him still more pointedly to the storm-centre of a cyclone, maintaining an absolute calm in the midst of the turbulence that encloses it. If his silence was magnanimous, it was also, in effect at least, strategical. If he had replied to his adversaries, he would have staked his cause on the cogency of his polemic, and conquest of his opponents on their own ground was uncertain. But his silence left their argument face to face with his intuitions, which were "as the air, invulnerable" to the blows from the "partizans" of his assailants. There is no answer to the expression of a profound spiritual conviction except the expression of a spiritual conviction still profounder, and this answer his antagonists were in no position to give.

The chivalry of Emerson toward his opponents is pleasantly reflected in an instance of punctilio reported by Miss Elizabeth Peabody. That lady begged Emerson to re-insert in the printed copy of his address a qualifying and cautionary passage which had been omitted at the time of delivery. He reflected, and said, "No:

these gentlemen have committed themselves against what I did read; and it would not be courteous or fair to spring upon them this passage now, which would convict them of an unwarranted inference." This is fairly to luxuriate in magnanimity; it is the libertinage of generosity: but the anecdote is too instructive to be spared. Another curious point reported by Miss Peabody is Emerson's refusal to print the "friend of man" with a capital *F*. "No," said Emerson, "directly I put that large *F* in they will all go to sleep." The Scripture injunction was remembered, and the dove was a little serpentine.

His wife confirmed his resolution of silence. A passage from the "Journal" deserves citation: —

"What said my brave Asia concerning the paragraph writers, to-day? that 'this whole practice of self-justification and recrimination betwixt literary men seemed every whit as low as the quarrels of the Paddies.'

"Then said I, 'But what will you say, excellent Asia, when my smart article comes out in the paper, in reply to Mr. A. and Dr. B.?' 'Why, then,' answered she, 'I shall feel the first emotion of fear and sorrow on your account.' — 'But do you know,' I asked, 'how many fine things I have thought of to say to these fighters? They are too good to be lost.' 'Then,' rejoined the queen, 'there is some merit in being silent.'"

If two angels set up housekeeping together, that law of polarity, of which Emerson was inordinately fond, would induce one to adopt the part of paragon and the other that of scape-grace. The part which Emerson preferred to assume in the conjugal encounter is clearly

disclosed in the above narrative. One is half pleased to find him confessing, even in jest, a relish for his own felicities.

The relations of Emerson and the Reverend Henry Ware, formerly his chief at the Second Church, and now the foremost professor of divinity at Cambridge, were not so much modified as defined by the delivery of the famous "Address." Ware, on the night of delivery, had expressed a general approval which the sober counsels of a meditative night induced him, in a gentle and considerate letter, to modify or retract. Emerson replied in a letter which all his lovers must cherish and the spirit of which must be divined from the single clause that space permits us to extract: "I could not pay the nobleness of my friends so mean a compliment as to suppress my opposition to their supposed views out of fear of offense." On September 23, Ware preached against Emerson's views or the views associated with Emerson's name in a sermon entitled "The Personality of God." Some manly and lovable words accompanied the copy of this address which he forwarded to Emerson. The reply must be quoted in full: —

CONCORD, October 8, 1838.

MY DEAR SIR, — I ought sooner to have acknowledged your kind letter of last week, and the sermon it accompanied. The letter was right manly and noble. The sermon, too, I have read with attention. If it assails any doctrine of mine, — perhaps I am not so quick to see it as writers generally, — certainly I did not feel any disposition to depart from my habitual

contentment, that you should say your thought, whilst I say mine. I believe I must tell you what I think of my new position. It strikes me very oddly that good and wise men at Cambridge and Boston should think of raising me into an object of criticism. I have always been — from my very incapacity of methodical writing — a "chartered libertine," free to worship and free to rail, — lucky when I could make myself understood, but never esteemed near enough to the institutions and mind of society to deserve the notice of the masters of literature and religion. I have appreciated fully the advantages of my position, for I well know there is no scholar less willing or less able than myself to be a polemic. I could not give an account of myself, if challenged. I could not possibly give you one of the "arguments" you cruelly hint at, on which any doctrine of mine stands; for I do not know what arguments are in reference to any expression of a thought. I delight in telling what I think; but if you ask me how I dare say so, or why it is so, I am the most helpless of mortal men. I do not even see that either of these questions admits of an answer. So that in the present droll posture of my affairs, when I see myself suddenly raised to the importance of a heretic, I am very uneasy when I advert to the supposed duties of such a personage, who is to make good his thesis against all comers. I certainly shall do no such thing. I shall read what you and other good men write, as I have always done, glad when you speak my thoughts, and skipping the page that has nothing for me. I shall go on just as before, seeing whatever I can, and telling what I see; and, I suppose, with the same

fortune that has hitherto attended me, — the joy of finding that my abler and better brothers, who work with the sympathy of society, loving and beloved, do now and then unexpectedly confirm my conceptions, and find my nonsense is only their own thought in motley, — and so I am your affectionate servant,

R. W. Emerson.

This letter is peculiarly interesting in its ready — nay its almost gloating — avowal of the two intellectual sins that have been most stoutly laid to Emerson's account — the incapacity for methodical writing, and the inability to reason. His meekness on the latter point is really Olympian: "for I do not know what arguments are in reference to any expression of a thought." The "babe-like Jupiter" that Emerson was could not coo more innocently after the launching of his thunderbolt. Our critique of "Nature" and "The American Scholar" in a later chapter will enable the reader to divine the extent of our commiseration for this deplored and dreaded incapacity for methodical writing. Emerson's testimony on the second point, the inability to reason, is almost equally authoritative. It is curious, though it proves nothing, that the clause quoted above in which he denies his power to argue is introduced by a causal "for"; in other words, it states a reason, and an argument is nothing more than a reason militant, a reason armed to meet and overcome doubt. Furthermore, let us note that he has "appreciated fully the advantages of [his] position." He has, indeed; he is not the man to spare his opponents one jot or tittle of those formidable

incapacities. Emerson knew or felt in some obscure corner of his consciousness or unconsciousness the supreme artistic finish, the æsthetic and tactical effectiveness, of this alleged helplessness which gave to his admitted powers so ample a field and so perfect a shelter. His characteristic humor — the humor of treating himself like a penniless waif or lovable imbecile of the Dickensian type — is finely exhibited in the letter, and the spirit of the whole, after all deductions for strategic play and delicate poses, is as courageous and generous as the most exigent of his spoiled admirers could desire.

A few citations from the "Journals" will clarify still further Emerson's state of mind: —

"I have usually read that a man suffered more from one hard word than he enjoyed from ten good ones. My own experience does not confirm the saying. The censure (I either know or fancy) does not hit me; and the praise is very good."

The amount of elasticity or versatility in Emerson may be roughly gauged by comparing this hospitality to praise with the following passage dated twenty-six days later: —

"I hate to be defended in a newspaper . . . as soon as honied words of praise are spoken for me, I feel as one that lies unprotected before his enemies."

It is curious to find the most violent of his reported utterances on this subject directed toward his champions.

The ensuing passage shows that sensitiveness in heroism, that temperance in fortitude, which human nature craves in its models: —

"It is difficult not to be affected by sour faces. . . . The state is so new and strange and unpleasing that a man will, maugre all his resolutions, lose his sweetness and his flesh, he will pine and fret."

But, in a later entry, the key is altogether manly, and humility is opposed to scorn: —

"Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted. No man, I think, had ever a greater well-being with a less desert than I. I can very well afford to be counted bad or foolish by a few dozen or a few hundred persons — I who see myself greeted by the good expectation of so many friends far beyond any power of thought or communication of thought residing in me. Besides, I own, I am often inclined to take part with those who say I am bad or foolish, for I fear I am both. I believe and know there must be a perfect compensation. I know too well my own dark spots. Not having myself attained, not satisfied myself, far from a holy obedience, how can I expect to satisfy others, to command their love? A few sour faces, a few biting paragraphs, — is but a cheap expiation for all these shortcomings of mine."

Heroism is prone to fortify itself by two opposite expedients, by minimizing its sufferings and so lifting itself to the plane of the superhuman, or by magnifying their extent, and thus putting in a clearer light the intrepidity of its resistance. Emerson recognizes that the assaults are trying without admitting that they are weighty, and will not humor his vanity to the extent of calling himself either invulnerable or magnanimous.

The genuineness of a high attitude has seldom been better authenticated.

It is time to say a word or two of three members of the group of friends who made up Emerson's intimate circle in the simple but select society of Concord.

Between 1836 and 1846, Margaret Fuller was "an established friend and frequent inmate of our house, and was accustomed, during this period, to come, once in three or four months, to spend a week or a fortnight with us." The remarkable person who impressed strongly the New England of her time and who had the knack of eliciting homage from people far abler and worthier than herself remains, at our present distance, one of the most inscrutable of personalities. There is no lack of clear-cut, even of poignant and mordant, traits, but in the wilderness of attributes one searches fruitlessly for the evasive character: one chases Margaret through Margaret in vain. It is not merely that her published writings give slight indications either of intellectual eminence or of that temperamental vigor which would account for her mastership in conversation, — that they suggest, indeed, either an astonishing good luck with her contemporaries or a grave misadventure with posterity, — but that even the "Memorabilia" which the piety of her friends has compiled do not convey the impression which they obviously wish to convey. Poor Emerson conducts his share of the "Memoirs" in a ceremonious, laborious fashion, praising assiduously, compunctiously, almost apprehensively, bringing up each new excellence for the inspection of the sceptical

reader with an anxious "There, will that convince you?" When he tells us that she wore her friends "like a necklace of diamonds about her neck," that she resembled "the queen of some parliament of love," and that "persons were her game," his intentions are quite void of malevolence. He does not withhold the evidence of her childish superstitions (she was given to omens and amulets), of her colossal egotism which found in America, after painstaking search, no intellect comparable to her own, of her social veracity which skirted the magnificent and the brutal in the same breath.

The facts half persuade us to believe that Miss Fuller, in spite of a coating of masculinity, was at heart profoundly feminine, that she was indeterminate, that she shared in that receptiveness and plasticity, that dependence on suggestion, which has been attributed, more or less plausibly, to women so eminent as George Eliot and George Sand. The possession of considerable ability and of a masterful temper enabled her to screen this formlessness and instability from the eyes of her admiring contemporaries. Her abilities, her pursuits, her ardors, were loose, versatile, and tentative. Hence that splendor in conversation — that response to the mood, the hour — which had too little reality or stability to be capable of transference to the printed page or of reproduction in spoken words on the ensuing day. She was not a strong soul with speech as its appropriate and exclusive vehicle; she was a formless being to whom speech imparted the semblance of organization.

These criticisms apply chiefly to the New England Margaret, the prodigy and prophetess, the precocious

child pampered on Latin and Greek, the student of art, the literary critic, the editor of the "Dial," the leader of exalted conversations, and the cultivator of friendships on the high level and the grand scale. In Italy, 1847–50, she was lucky both in fortune and misfortune. She won the love and accepted the hand of Angelo Ossoli, a plain, affectionate, and faithful young man, in whom these merits lost none of their worth by association with an Italian countship; she bore a child; she aided Italian freedom by faithful and admirable service in hospitals during the siege of Rome; and, under the humanizing influence of contact with the plainer and sterner order of realities, becomes for the first time really interesting. She perished with her husband and her child off Fire Island Beach, Long Island, in the wreck of the Elizabeth, on which the party had taken passage for America.

That Emerson admired and valued Miss Fuller is certain, though, as often happens in commerce, the stock curiously shrank when tested by an inventory; whether he "liked" her is another question. Mr. Cabot is probably right in supposing that "a slight shudder qualified the pleasure with which he welcomed her visits to his house." She taught him nothing and the stimulus she brought was rather galvanic than intellectual. But Emerson's gratitude for stimuli included even influences that were momentarily perturbing or distracting, and he was always magnetized by the gift of spontaneous and eloquent conversation. In animated speech the air seemed tremulous with possibilities; a dialogue held for him the palpitant interest of a *séance*. Margaret

Fuller and other such dominating personalities affected him with a vague but kindling sense of power, like the rush of unseen wings in the air, or the reverberation of the tread of hurrying multitudes in a remote street.

A person who influenced Emerson far more than the spectacular Miss Fuller, whose effect on him was in the bold word of the unexaggerating Mr. Cabot "prodigious," was A. Bronson Alcott, a native of Connecticut, who in 1835 first met Emerson and who settled with his wife and daughters in Concord in 1840. The peculiarity of this remarkable personage may be compressed into a few words: his mind became, in a rare and surprising degree, the exclusive domicile — one might almost say property — of three or four lofty and interior principles. To this result his rustic birth, meagre schooling, and scant opportunities had doubtless contributed by leaving his mind comparatively void of secondary accomplishments, ideas, and motives. Alcott was cooped up, so to speak, in his very infinitudes. He appears to have effected, like Emerson, a fusion of Platonism and Christianity, in which the singleness of the world, the omnipotence of spirit, and the riches and sanctities of the human soul were the cardinal beliefs.

The devotion he brought to these ideas was as simple and absolute as the principles themselves. He organized a school in Boston in which the great intellectual and moral verities were to be educed from infant minds by skilful interrogatories — an experiment which Boston, with the ingenuity of plastic communities in extracting a double sensation from the same enterprise, first acclaimed and then anathematized. He bore the unde-

served scandal that overwhelmed his undertaking with the unalterable sweetness of a disinterested and benignant mind. He had the childlike innocence which made it necessary for Emerson to warn his English associates of his complete untrustworthiness in points of fact, and the childlike magnanimity which made it quite safe to commit the accusatory letter to his own keeping. Of Fruitlands, his socialistic community, a word must be said later. He certified to the soundness of his fibre by the begetting of Louisa Alcott, the sanest of story-writers, was the best of fathers and husbands, abstained conscientiously from flesh, and his irreverence for money culminated in the sacrilege of giving a mendicant a twenty-dollar gold-piece for want of a smaller coin.

The service of Alcott to Emerson was great and distinct. He offered sympathy, he offered comradeship, to that part of Emerson's nature which was rarest and therefore most solitary. The distinguishing and hence the insulative element in Emerson was the extent to which highly abstracted principles took shape in his mind as vivid realities and commanded an entire devotion. In this faculty Alcott shared. Emerson, the master of hyperbole (who reconciles this function in some abstruse way with that of hater of the superlative), avails himself of all his skill in the glorification of his new friend. "He has more of the godlike than any man I have ever seen." "The most extraordinary man and the highest genius of his time. He is a man." Later on, he became aware of his limitations; there are seven pages of the "Journal" in which the god is taken to pieces with amazing expertness and candor: but even

here dissection takes place, so to speak, *upon the altar.* The place of Alcott in his regard remained unique.

Alcott is, indeed, a most instructive figure for the critic of Emerson; he represents the upper Emerson cut off from the lower, and by his limitations and relative inefficiency, he illustrates, as nothing else could do, the priceless service which this lower Emerson rendered to the upper. The Emersonian nature may be figured as a sky: its zenith is a point, but its plane of intersection with the lower earth, its horizon, in other words, is of vast extent. Alcott was pure zenith, and, like that mark in the sky, was perhaps more serviceable as a point of reference, as an attestation of completeness, than as an object of persistent contemplation. His embosomment in principles was a comfort and inspiration to Emerson, but Emerson loved the principle in its concreteness, its fertility, its frolic as it were, no less than in its chaste and austere vigils; on the latter side only was Alcott's help available. Its value, however, may be clearly inferred from the following passage in which he answers the objection that Alcott's thoughts are few: "But what were many thoughts, if he had not this distinguishing Faith, which is a palpable proclamation out of the deeps of nature that God yet is? With many thoughts, and without this, he would be only one more of a countless throng of lettered men; but now you cannot spare the fortification that he is."

Emerson's descriptions of the same man vary so much that the measurement of a man's real altitude in his mind demands a sort of triangulation, or coördination of views from remote standing-points. I may add, with

a change of figure, that it is often interesting to note the number of pounds the subject has lost or gained between successive weighings.

From 1842 to 1846 Nathaniel Hawthorne occupied the Old Manse, where Emerson had been a frequent visitor, and at one time an inmate, in the days of Ezra Ripley, and where the novelist was to write the sketch that has made its name proverbial. The two men saw little of each other: each dwelt in his own tent, as it were, and peeped at the other shyly and curiously now and again from the rifts in the closed curtain of the doorway. Hawthorne returned to Concord in 1852, but the restraint on intimacy was never broken. Emerson says: "It was easy to talk with him, — there were no barriers, — only, he said so little, that I talked too much, and stopped only because, as he gave no indications, I feared to exceed." He adds (the occasion is the burial of Hawthorne) with sincere regret: "Now it appears that I waited too long."

On a single occasion (September, 1842) they so far overcame their mutual diffidence as to undertake a two days' walk together to visit the community of Shakers near the town of Harvard. The days were beautiful, and the sights interesting; and it is pleasant to think of the two seers and mystics in their leisurely progress among the fringed gentians, the grapevines, and the wild apple trees, dropping a few mellow words like long-ripened fruits into the autumn stillness from time to time, and resting themselves from these portentous exertions in sunny and fruitful silences. Emerson seems to have felt a real esteem for Hawthorne, apart, of

course, from the latter's unfortunate mistake of adopting literature as a profession. "I admired the man, who was simple, amiable, truth-loving, and frank in conversation, but I never read his books with pleasure; they are too young." It is pleasant to find a critic open-minded enough to refuse to allow his estimate of a really intelligent man to be biased by such juvenilia as "The Scarlet Letter" and "The House of the Seven Gables." On another occasion in 1842, he is still more generous: "Nathaniel Hawthorne's reputation as a writer is a very pleasing fact, because his writing is not good for anything, and this is a tribute to the man."

The last name to be recorded is perhaps the most significant of all. Of French (Isle of Jersey) extraction and Massachusetts birth and rearing, Henry David Thoreau clung tenaciously to Concord all his life, plucking an indifferent and casual livelihood from the fields and roadsides as land-surveyor. He invented an excellent pencil, which he perfected and contemptuously threw aside, refusing with churlish magnanimity an attractive offer to bring his invention to the market.[1] In him wood-craft rose to a species of wood-magic; "he knew the country like a fox or a bird"; loved rigor in dates and measurements; abounded in rustic intuitions and clairvoyances; had eyes in his feet, drew birds to his shoulder and fishes into his hand, and supplied new species to the rejoicing Agassiz. The finish of the mere organism was superb. There was something of the

[1] Both Thoreau's biographer Mr. F. B. Sanborn (*Thoreau*, pages 37–38) and Dr. Emerson, while not denying the anecdote, contest its significance, on the ground that Thoreau pursued his father's calling, intermittently, for many years afterward.

animal in his make-up; but the fashions of animality are various, and Thoreau's fashion was not shaggy or stockish or bovine, but keen, nimble, and lithe: he reminded Mr. F. B. Sanborn of "some retired philosophical woodchuck or magnanimous fox."

He spent two years in austere self-support in a hermitage built by his own hands on the banks of Walden. Two years is a time long enough to refute the charge of dilettantism yet short enough to lend color to the accusation of instability; the proposed *demonstration* takes on the slighter aspect of a *feat*. His moral conduct shows — particularly, on its noblest side, the unflinching antagonism to slavery — a combination of freak and greatheartedness. His brief imprisonment for refusing to pay taxes to a slaveholder's government was genuine, no doubt, if somewhat erratic; but the effect to-day, on persons aware of its actual slightness and its wide publicity, is slightly spectacular. The impressiveness which this special recalcitrancy failed to achieve was amply secured by many other courageous and manly remonstrances in behalf of the suffering blacks.

Thoreau, on certain sides, might be compared to Hawthorne's Donatello in "The Marble Faun," but he was a Donatello whose birth had been allotted to a community of earnest and austere religious feeling and whose maturity coincided with the emergence of the Transcendentalists. By all precedents the wood-child should have shuddered at the sound of the church-bells, but Thoreau touched the crest of paradox in responding profoundly, not perhaps to the bells, but to the influences they typified. If Emerson hardly did justice

to his good luck in securing a faun and a mystic under the cover of a single epidermis, the cause may be sought in the fact that the invaluable peculiarity of Thoreau's organization did not shape his philosophy, or even, in any strict or entire sense, dominate his authorship. One would have prophesied of such a man that his culture would have been indigenous, his literature unsophisticated, and his philosophy original. In the actual outcome, his culture was classic and Oriental, his writing markedly literary, and his view of life (wood-craft apart) to all appearances imitative.

He had a high literary gift, an English far less striking and rich but far more readable and more of a piece than Emerson's, full of nimble turns and darting figures, possessed, indeed, of a gliding suppleness and flowing vivacity which he might have caught from his French ancestors or from the perches in Walden. The bent of his mind is clearly expressed in the circumstance that his natural history, however copious or precise, never trammels his literature, and that, clear and sure as his vision and knowledge may be, it is less the profile than the savor of nature that his pages vividly reproduce. His verse had freedom and sincerity.

The philosophy which interrupts the idyl with rather vexatious frequency is mostly a defence of genuineness: yet, oddly enough, it affects the reader not as insincere but as derivative. Concord noted in Thoreau the intonations of Emerson's voice, and Emerson caught the same reverberation in his mind. This is the reason, no doubt, why the superlatives bestowed upon Thoreau are no more bountiful than those lavished upon persons who

have far less the air of having been planned by Providence to actualize a dream of Emerson. It is true that Thoreau professed independence of mankind, and that his friend blames him for paradox and contradiction, but both of these habits are, after all, fashions of relating one's self to the society of one's time. The truth is that his intellectual plasticity was attended by a vein of temperamental stubbornness and wilfulness, and his consciousness of debt to Emerson may have sharpened his appetite for contradiction.

Whatever doubts or differences flecked the surface of their friendship, its depths were untroubled, and its cordiality and fidelity remained unimpaired at the time of Thoreau's death in 1862. Emerson had befriended Thoreau in the latter's college days, and, later, on two distinct occasions, invited him to share the Emerson domicile for years at a time. His presence in the house during Emerson's second trip to Europe in 1847–48 was a main reassurance to the solicitudes of the traveller. His knowledge of grafting proved of benefit to a philosopher's orchard; he had the homely knacks and skills which propitiate the least mundane of housewives; and the fealty of the children was unshakable from the start. In the fact that he was loved by children and hated by mediocrities, he has two lasting titles to the esteem of sane men, and the command of rare materials and distinguished style should keep his prose at least perennially notable.

The briefest account of Emerson's Concord circle would be incomplete without some mention of a lady for whom his feeling was profound and peculiar, Miss

Elizabeth Hoar, formerly the betrothed of his brother Charles, and inheritor, in a sense, of the fraternal rights of Charles in his heart. What individualizes this woman among his friends is not the superlative terms in which she is recommended — there is hardly any friend whom he does not from time to time enwrap in a tissue of superlatives — but the total absence of those retrocessionals or palinodes to which, in the privacy of the "Journals," nearly every one except his kith and kin is liable. Of her he says in an emphatic phrase where italics lend incisiveness to brevity: "*Elizabeth Hoar consecrates.*" His praise is substantiated by the clearness of this woman's eyes, as they meet us in the Hartwell crayon of the "Journals," and by the worth and wit of her sayings as recorded in those volumes. She shared largely in that peculiar trait of the Emersonian stock and circle which enabled them to say "good things" in the lightest and the gravest sense of that varying adjective, and which almost justifies the French in their double application of the word "esprit" to the third person of the trinity and to the sallies of Voltaire. It is doubtful whether, after the death of his brothers, any other friend came so close to his intellectual and religious sympathies.

Another person whom Emerson highly valued, or, at least, conscientiously esteemed, was Sarah Alden (Bradford) Ripley, wife of Samuel Ripley, Emerson's uncle, a clergyman, who moved from Waltham to Concord in 1846. (The reader who has lost his clew in the tangle of the Emerson relationships may be thankful to be reminded that Phebe Emerson, the paternal grandmother of Ralph Waldo, was married, after her first

husband's death, to Dr. Ezra Ripley of Concord, and that Samuel Ripley, a son of this marriage, was therefore half-brother to Waldo's father, William Emerson.) Mrs. Sarah Ripley was a person the fame of whose Greek and science is still faintly audible to our inattentive generation and who seems to have extenuated these dubious accomplishments by the possession of a keen wit and a kind heart. Moncure D. Conway, whose work, "Emerson at Home and Abroad," is described by Miss Elizabeth Peabody, in a phrase whose succulence is inexhaustible, as "a beautiful apotheosis," classes Sarah Ripley with Emerson's mother and his Aunt Mary in the group of "Three Fates" who presided over the seer's life. In a chapter entitled "Concordia" he relates the following: "I had heard at Cambridge a story that Audubon called once to consult this lady on the lichens of her neighborhood, and found her hearing at once the lesson of a Harvard student in differential calculus, correcting the translation of another from Sophocles, at the same time shelling peas, and rocking her grandchild's cradle with her foot." Emerson records with interest that she willingly carried through the leading streets of Boston a broom which the indomitable Aunt Mary, as a touchstone of character, had put into her hand — a fact significant to us through its evident significance for Emerson.

In a survey of Emerson's Concord associations, one is struck by the fact that his more intimate or at least more sedulous companions, Miss Fuller, Alcott, Ellery Channing, and Thoreau, make up a peculiar group of not too sharply defined and by no means wholly amiable

or sympathetic personalities. This fact is accentuated by the ease with which one could select from Emerson's remoter ties or less continuous associates a group of distinct, normal, and lovable characters, — let us say for instance, Henry Ware, W. H. Furness, James Elliot Cabot, and John Sterling. This may be partly explained by the further fact that a certain bumptiousness may have been needed to overleap even the outer barriers of Emerson's constitutional reserve; it may also have depended in part on the probability that no one of the latter group would have carried a broom, or, to make the example adequately masculine, have propelled a wheelbarrow across Boston Common between Summer and Hancock Streets. It seems clear that Emerson, at this period of his life, welcomed in his companionship a tartness, a sharp tang or high seasoning, which set at rest his dread of the conventional.

It is now our duty to say something of the "Dial," the quarterly magazine (Emerson, in contempt of etymology, calls it a quarterly "Journal") which served from 1840 to 1844 as the mouthpiece of the Transcendental impulse. It was edited for two years by Margaret Fuller, with the assistance of George Ripley, and, on the break-down of her health, was handed over to the reluctant but faithful tutelage of Emerson. Each number was supposed to comprise one hundred and thirty-six octavo pages, prose and verse, divided into relatively brief articles of which the first number contained

twenty-seven. Its price was three dollars a year, its subscription list numbered two hundred and fifty, and steadily contracted; and it fled forlornly from discouraged publisher to publisher. A duration of four years under such handicaps is almost to be described as longevity.

The two great supports of later periodical literature, the solid authoritative article on the timely subject and the attractive short tale or novel, were either excluded from the "Dial" or found but casual and intermittent access to its pages. The magazine, under Emerson's direction at least, was benignant, in its preoccupied way, toward social progress, but it was a roving, or at best a planless and inconsecutive, benignity; it left the reformer hungry and half pleased. The commercial value of such matter was clearly brought out in the fact that an article by Theodore Parker on a temperance embroilment sold an entire issue, and the blindness or indifference of the management to such results is interestingly suggested by the belated and grudging approval which Emerson, then editor, conceded to the manuscript. It would seem that in the "Dial" it was the airy matter that fell flat, and the earthy and massive substance that gave buoyancy to the enterprise.

The prevalent ridicule of Transcendentalism no doubt told against the success of the venture. The suicidal suggestion had been made to call the magazine the "Transcendentalist," but Alcott, tactful for once, had interposed with the not infelicitous substitute, the "Dial," and averted what would have been in effect the drowning of the child in the baptismal font. The

prospectus by R. W. Emerson was sky-colored, and, even in the attempts to be practical, the same idealism is amusingly perceptible. Emerson writes: "It should — should it not? — be a degree nearer to the hodiernal facts than my writings are." This is really delectable, particularly that open-minded "Should it not?" The style of "Nature" and "The Over-Soul" is to be lowered *by one degree* and thus brought within the range of the magazine public. A firmer grasp of the practical situation was clearly necessary at a time when even Holmes, afterwards so warm a friend to Emerson, could amuse Harvard with mockery of the new sect, and when two of its own supporters, J. F. Clarke and C. P. Cranch, could beguile their leisure with caricatures of its failings. Pecuniary strictures added to the embarrassment. The contributions were not remunerated and the salary of the editor was fixed with parsimony and paid with meanness, — conditions under which — without impugning Miss Fuller's veracity — the health of most magazine editors would be subject to breakdown. Add to these causes the two great shrinkages that distract an editor's life, the shrinkage in "ability" when it hardens into "articles" and the shrinkage in approbation when congealed into subscriptions, and the hardships of the "Dial" become only too intelligible.

The impression in our own day is very general that the journals and magazines are demoralized by that subservience to the public taste which seems, in practice, to go hand-in-hand with the least respectful estimate of the quality of that taste. A peculiar interest is thereby imparted to a question which the "Dial" is

peculiarly qualified to resolve: what would be the actual merit of a periodical in which the pursuit of literary and ethical aims should be quite unhindered by the wish to cajole, to humor, or to propitiate the public? In the "Dial" the *purgation* at all events is complete; the meannesses are expelled; it takes, as Mr. Cabot observes, the highest tone upon all subjects; the work, strong or weak, is that of men who sincerely want the best, — a want which is itself an excellence.

Moreover, the "Dial's" share in the preservative storax and chlorine and rosemary at which people laughed in the Divinity School Address is noticeable; its freshness, even to-day, has rather lessened than disappeared. The particular interests of our time do not animate its pages; in that case they would cease to be particular. But the remarkable thing is the "Dial's" relative independence of the particular interests of yesterday. Reviews of local concerts and exhibitions of pictures, of books whose interest was temporary, recall the passage of time to the present-day reader; but much of the "Dial" is either applicable to-day, or, at least, could be readily conceived as becoming newly applicable to-morrow.

On the question of literary merit, it is only just to remember that Emerson, on the whole America's best man, contributed to the "Dial" three well-known lectures, "The Transcendentalist," "Man the Reformer," and "The Young American," three brief but distinctive essays, "Gifts," "The Comic," and the second "Art," several reviews comprising some of his weightiest judgments on books, and from fifteen to twenty poems, in-

cluding some of the prime "nurslings of immortality," "The Snow-Storm," "The Problem," and the first "Wood-Notes." This magazine, also, introduced Thoreau to his contemporaries. The other writers were of an order fit, not to compete, but to consort and to coalesce, with these refulgencies. When it is added that all the contributors, even Emerson, were novices in literature, that they were drawn, mostly or wholly, from a narrow section of a small province of a pushing industrial commonwealth, the high average merit of thought and style in their experiments assumes heightened and freshened significance.

The fecundation of religion by thought and literature, the quite new valuation both of intellect and taste which results from their engagement as aids and servants of the spiritual life, is an outstanding peculiarity of the group. A high refinement, which is the complement of this spirituality, becomes inimical to substance in the feebler writers, and is more favorable to the delicacy of the fluid and sometimes florid prose than to the maintenance of distinct form in the loose-trailing and, so to speak, wind-blown verses. We find something a little cloistral, a little expectant, a little feminine, or (combining the two last traits) even a little virginal, in the attitude of these firstlings of the nascent spirit. They express a hope so new that its confines are still imperceptible. Except in Emerson, the very piety seems largely hope: they give us less the authentic and realized vision than the prophetic thrill which traverses the soul when the curtains of the innermost sanctities begin visibly and urgently to palpitate. It may be remarked in

passing that the choice of subjects for Emerson's contributions to the "Dial" suggests his willingness to show to the world in this relation not his worldly (the non-existent is hardly subject to exhibition), but his mundane, side.

One other fact, at once piquant and important, must be specified. Nature satirized the emphasis which this band of devotees gave to the isolation of the private soul by imparting to their work a mocking homogeneity. These apostles of unlikeness preach the gospel of divergence in tones that are almost indistinguishable. Miss E. L. Cary, in her "Emerson, Poet and Thinker," — a book whose intelligence is unfairly obscured by its popularity or rather by its quest for popularity, — points out "how closely many of Emerson's associates were in sympathy with his opinions," and illustrates her point by convincing citations from Hedge and Ripley. Was Emerson the common guide? A comparison of ages and a due estimate of the scantness and newness of the Concord seer's publications seem almost to preclude the hypothesis of discipleship. Strong doubt appears to be thrown upon the supposition that Emerson's brain was the special and peculiar retort in which Platonic, German, French, and English ideas were fused and recrystallized into the form with which his genius is so constantly associated. It seems probable that the causes of this special development were not *personal*, since the result appears in other men than Emerson at nearly the same time, nor *universal*, since England, Germany, and France had access to all the ingredients and had, abstractly, quite as good a right as Massachusetts to the invention of the mixture: rather it was

local, the product of conditions peculiar at that epoch to New England, and definable perhaps as an unrivaled parity or equilibrium between three great impulses, the cravings for religion, thought, and beauty.

Emerson was not a willing editor. His father had been prominent in the conduct of the "Monthly Anthology," a magazine which Holmes reviews in his life of Ralph Waldo in the same spirit of amused and indulgent curiosity in which Austin Dobson might have contemplated a satin slipper or a peacock fan of the seventeenth or eighteenth century. The son in earlier times had entertained with momentary gusto the project of a magazine of which he and his brothers were to bear the intellectual expense. But at the date we have now reached he had formed that combination of fixity and elasticity in his habits which made him uneasy and restive under the cramp of a novel obligation. He had written in 1839, "I will never be editor," yet, when, in 1842, Miss Fuller and the "Dial" parted, each in need of a sick-nurse, Emerson, who hated invalids, became dutifully responsible for the care of the latter. He performed his uncongenial duties with fidelity, and the death of his patient in 1844 was a relief which no doubt helped him to face calmly the payment (as it seems) of three hundred dollars from his own pocket to meet outstanding obligations.

The sterling sincerity of the men who supported the "Dial" was attested by the embarkation of many of

their number in an undertaking which, like the literary enterprise, was unfortunate, yet neither unblest nor ignoble in its career or its catastrophe. "The Brook-Farm Association for Industry and Education," as it was called, was organized in the double hope of substituting mutual help for competition and at the same time conserving, in its fullness, even in its rigor, the liberty of the individual. A farm was purchased at West Roxbury about 1841; a joint-stock company was formed, and an annual interest of five per cent was guaranteed on shares consisting of a hundred dollars each. The surplus profits, after expenses (including interest) were paid, were to be distributed among the individual members in amounts proportioned to the work each had performed. Each member chose his own labor, and fixed the hours of his own day; manual and brain work were paid for at the same rate. House rent, fuel, food, and clothing were guaranteed by the association to every member. An excellent school refined and dignified the enterprise. The varying membership averaged about seventy. A report issued by the directors in 1844 spoke confidently of the prosperity of the experiment, but an injudicious acceptance of certain elements in the Fourierite scheme and the burning of the phalanstery in 1847 subjected the organization to a strain which overtaxed its immature powers. In the autumn of 1847 it broke up.

The failure merely illustrated an old rule; more significant was the moral atmosphere of the place which seems to have combined amenity and pungency in felicitous proportions. Mr. Frothingham's epithet is "sunny"; Emerson says that the most fastidious called it the

pleasantest of residences. Emerson's utterances on the subject are of varying tenor and temperature; it is one of the many topics in one's traffic with the philosopher in which you can take your estimate, hot from the oven or cold from the refrigerator, at your choice. At one point[1] "the parching air burns frore," but the ice dissolves in other places, and the tone of his review of "Brook Farm" is benignant though amused and condescending. He calls it, with a good nature that is perhaps quite as destructive as malice, "a perpetual picnic, a French Revolution in small, an Age of Reason in a patty-pan." On the subject of the married women's objections to the common nursery, he almost chuckles: "Eggs might be hatched in ovens, but the hen on her own account much preferred the old way. A hen without her chickens was but half a hen." He appreciates Mr. Ripley's pregnant anecdote: "There is your accomplished friend ——: he would hoe corn all Sunday if I would let him, but all Massachusetts could not make him do it on Monday."

Emerson's own relation to the movement is happily described by Dr. Holmes as "tangential." The question of joining the association had deeply exercised both his intelligence and conscience. What is a philosopher to do who is lured and repelled by strong forces at the same time, who worships courage but distrusts organization, who loves mankind but who prefers the race cut up into diminutive morsels, who favors revolution in his own way, but who finds that his soul ripens best in the placid wontedness of his own study? He writes to Miss

[1] See *Journals*, VI, 373–74.

Fuller in 1840: "What a brave thing Mr. Ripley has done! he stands now at the head of the Church Militant." But he adds in the same paragraph: "At the name of a society all my repulsions play, all my quills rise and sharpen."

At a later meeting in his own house, the quills were still more unmannerly. "Yesterday George and Sophia Ripley, Margaret Fuller and Alcott discussed here the Social Plans. I wished to be convinced, to be thawed, to be made nobly mad by the kindlings before my eye of a new dawn of human piety. But this scheme was arithmetic and comfort: this was a hint borrowed from the Tremont House and United States Hotel; a rage in our poverty and politics to live rich and gentlemanlike; an anchor to leeward against a change of weather; a prudent forecast on the probable issue of the great questions of Pauperism and Poverty. And not once could I be inflamed, but sat aloof and thoughtless; my voice faltered and fell. It was not the cave of persecution which is the palace of spiritual power, but only a room in the Astor House hired for the Transcendentalists. I do not wish to remove from my present prison to a prison a little larger. I wish to break all prisons."

We quote only half the passage: the unquoted half corrects in part the impression of a too shrinking fastidiousness, of an approach to fine-ladyism in the moral sphere, which might be left on some minds by the forecited paragraph. Emerson is certainly a little exigent. He expects people to produce the effect of a *Te Deum* while engaged in the act of ordering their dinner, and rather ignores the possibility that a dinner rationally

and humanly ordered may have its issue somewhere in the heightened praise of God. One is content that Emerson should go his own way, but, on a review of his various commentaries on Brook Farm, with their pointed strictures and their gay condescensions, one half wishes for an ampler recognition of those on whom the ideal had imposed grave risks and heavy labors. He praised Elizabeth Hoar for her discerning application of the fine Napoleonic saying, "Respect the burden," to Lincoln under the goad of Wendell Phillips's unsparing oratory. Perhaps a tongue as delicately just and gentle as Elizabeth's might have suggested the right of Brook Farm to a like measure of chivalrous forbearance.

He decided against Brook Farm "very slowly" and almost "with penitence"; of Alcott's project for a community called Fruitlands near the town of Harvard, which struck him as a futile barter of common sense for a shabby half-measure of idealism, he made shorter work. Indeed, he was so round with Alcott on the subject that he was moved to ask that gentleman to pound him a little "by way of squaring the account." The two Englishmen, H. C. Wright and Charles Lane, who united with Alcott in this ill-judged and ill-fated undertaking and whom Emerson had duly but ineffectually warned of the mild Platonist's untrustworthiness in matters of fact, pleased and teased and tantalized him and called into peculiarly active exercise his unique faculty for self-reversal or self-contradiction. Thus, on page 241 of the sixth volume of the "Journals," he names ten "supreme people," who are everlastingly

memorable and indispensable to him, and in this chaplet of worthies a place is assigned to Charles Lane. But on pages 411–12 of the same volume he is almost beating his breast and chanting "*mea culpa*" for his total want of sympathy for this "alien," this freezing Charles Lane. He can even find room for contradictory points of view within the embrace of a paragraph. Lane is in one place "a pure, superior, mystical, intellectual, and gentle soul"; in the same sentence he becomes "a fighter in the ring"; and, later on, is a born warrior and expert swordsman. This is too Emersonian to be quarrelled with; one does not chafe at the presence of nutmegs in the Spice Islands. If complaint were anywhere valid, it would attach itself to the deceptive air of totality and finality with which these tentative and temporary judgments are set forth. Emerson's affirmations resembled those Roman camps which might change their place from night to night, but which gave to each shifting station in turn the fixed order and defined security of a city.

To return to Fruitlands, the mistakes and vagaries of which have been clearly summarized by the editors of the "Journals." "High conversation" was too prevalent; the soil is said to have been poor, and the aid of animal manures was conscientiously rejected. The list of unclean foods, which included the flesh of beasts and all products of slave labor, shows a very luxury of asceticism, an orgy of relinquishment. "Sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate, wine, spices, rice, meat, fish, poultry, eggs, milk, butter, cheese, honey, and even fine flour were excluded; also wool and cotton." Grains, vegeta-

bles, and local fruit supplied the meagre table. Emerson visited them in July, 1843, and feasted (the word is hardly too strong) on the nobility and delicacy of the moral atmosphere. But even in the enthusiasm of this first impression, his good sense asks shrewdly: What about December? Midwinter was not slow to substantiate these misgivings; the approach of starvation broke up the little community; and an ox-sled brought back to Concord the four "little women" and the shattered illusions of the Alcott household.

Emerson's aversion to communities must not be held to indicate an indifference to the social problems of which these organizations were the hasty outcome. He felt keenly that the economic needs of man were met by processes that had no root in his spiritual nature; he wished to simplify life, but he doubted if the road to simplification lay in the forming of clumsy and mechanical aggregates. He would have had the philosopher get his food from his own land by his own exertion, dispensing so far as possible with mercenary and servile intermediaries. He had even the temerity to propose experiments in his own household, a field that often daunts innovators who feel quite equal to the reconstruction of a state. The fate of one of these attempts is recorded in a letter to his brother William: —

"You know Lidian and I had dreamed that we would adopt the country practice of having but one table in the house. Well, Lidian went out the other evening and had an explanation on the subject with the two girls. Louisa accepted the plan with great kindness and readiness; but Lydia, the cook, firmly refused. A cook was

never fit to come to table, etc. The next morning Waldo was sent to announce to Louisa that breakfast was ready; but she had eaten already with Lydia, and refused to leave her alone. With our other project we are like to have the same fortune, as Mrs. Alcott is as much decided not to come as her husband is ready to come."

The spectacle of a project which had interested the intellect and conscience of the foremost man in America in process of shipwreck against the inbred and tenacious prejudices of a pair of domestics has both its comic and its instructive side. In a difference of opinion with the world at large, Emerson could be calmly sure of eventual mastery; the case was otherwise with cook and Louisa. He accepted his defeat meekly, and, it is to be feared, with thankfulness.

The Alcott project was an invitation to that family to share in the Emerson house growing out of the owner's uneasy sense that he occupied more room than his needs required or his principles approved. Here, again, the Emersons profited by that reënforcement of common sense which years of domestication with a visionary are prone to induce in a clear-sighted woman: Mrs. Alcott's refusal was unshakable.

These attempts, to which failure imparts a misleading aspect of childishness, could not be spared from the Emersonian record; they are gauges of sincerity.

The birth of Emerson's first daughter and second child, Ellen, occurred on February 25, 1839. The following is part of the entry in the "Journals": —

"Yesterday morning, 24 February at 8 o'clock, a

daughter was born to me, a soft, quiet, swarthy little creature, apparently perfect and healthy. My sacred child! Blessings on thy head, little winter bud! And comest thou to try thy luck in this world, and know if the things of God are things for thee? Well assured, and very soft and still, the little maiden expresses great contentment with all she finds, and her delicate but fixed determination to stay where she is, and grow."

It is pleasant once more to come upon this shy and respectful paternity, the mixture of vision and sturdy actuality which the child wears to his thought, and to note the tender and timid firmness with which he grasps the facts almost as the father might hold the babe itself.

The second daughter, Edith, was born November 22, 1841. Two months later, on January 28, 1842, the "Journals" contain this movingly brief entry: "Yesterday night, at fifteen minutes after eight, my little Waldo ended his life."

So peculiar was the impression made by this boy upon the family and their friends and, through their meagre outgivings, upon the public at large, that his death even now can hardly be read or recorded by distant strangers without a sense of heartbreak. One cannot recall another death at five years of which the mere record has induced a sense of bereavement so widespread and so acute. Emerson calls him in a single searching epithet "the deep-eyed boy," and again "a boy of early wisdom, of a grave and even majestic deportment, of a perfect gentleness"; and he writes to Carlyle: "A promise like that Boy's I shall never see." The child had possessed

himself of the hearts of less partial judges; the grave Elizabeth Hoar had met him with "plain and wise love," Thoreau had been his playfellow, and the remembrance of his promise shot a troubled ray through the torn soul of Margaret Fuller in her stormy exile.

The boy had been admitted to a large share of his father's companionship even in the hours and places consecrated to study, and that dainty wooing of his children, which went hand-in-hand with the capacity to view them at other times from an inter-stellar distance, checkered the day with bright episodes. "I like my boy," says Emerson, with the candor with which an honest man admits his eccentricities, — "I like my boy, with his endless, sweet soliloquies and iterations." "I love the dear children and miss their prattle," he writes, to his wife from Nantasket Beach, with the same air of the startled psychologist. He says in another letter, with a winning sense of parental responsibility: "In the pocket of the coat I will put a pebble from the beach for Waldo." He is bewitched by the children's grammar (he wished even grammar to be "spontaneous"). In the grave pages of the "Journals," among his weightiest and profoundest meditations, anecdotes of the children's words and acts are inserted here and there like poppies in the corn.

These records, as they stand in the "Journals," are affecting; transferred to other pages, they would seem puerile. Two or three, however, may be retained without indecorum by the austere biographer. Waldo's saying to his father, "I wish you would not dig your leg," is almost a classic, and became a proverb or byword

in the domestic circle. "When Dr. Jackson smoked a cigar, Waldo said: 'See the cobwebs come out of the gentleman's mouth.'" Emerson liked the proof of refinement offered by Waldo at the circus (to which he went under the guidance of the author of "The Over-Soul") when he watched the clown: "Papa, the funny man makes me want to go home." The boy's delicacy is perhaps more decisively evinced in the remark: "The flowers talk when the wind blows over them." The following entry may be excusably transcribed if only for the whimsical collocation of dates which places it in the "Journal" on the day after the famous Divinity School Address: "Little Waldo cheers the whole house by his mooing calls to the cat, to the birds, to the flies, — 'Pussy-cat, come see Waddow! Liddle Birdy, come see Waddow! Fies! Fies! come see Waddow!'"

The boy seems to have been neither morbid nor overstrung: the parents would appear to have displayed a sanity that was commendable in idolaters. Emerson speaks of "a perfect health and as happy a life . . . as ever child enjoyed"; and observes, in another place, that "the boy had his full swing." His virtue seems to have had its sanative limitations. His father mentions: "Waldo's diplomacy in giving account of Ellen's loud cries declares that she put her foot into his sandhouse and got pushed." It is also recorded that at an early age he found the hair of his little cousin "divine to pull."

The grief of Emerson for the child's death was unutterable. The letter to Carlyle is a moan. The "Journal" record two days after the death presents a picture

of ravage and desolation almost more affecting than its later embodiment in the heart-piercing verse of the "Threnody." Two years afterwards he writes: "I have had no experience, no progress, to put me into a better intelligence with my calamity than when it was new." On his deathbed, he smiled, and said, "Oh, that beautiful boy!" Against this must be set certain curious and chilling remarks in the essay on "Experience," in which with express reference to his son's death he hardily declares: "The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is." Later, he affirms, with pitiless candor, that "this calamity . . . falls off from me *and leaves no scar*" (the italics are ours). In comment on these assertions which must neither be put aside nor overvalued, it may be observed that Emerson's eye is here fixed on the soul within the soul, the core of the spiritual life; that he had many moods whose fashion it was to cut each other's acquaintance; that there is a form of partial dishonesty which is produced by an excess of devotion to candor; that a parade of hardness may have seemed to him a wholesome counterpoise to the fashionable parade of sensibility. That Waldo's death wrought no change in the form of his inner life is probably quite true; his two great passions, so far as we can judge, were his love for Ellen Tucker and his grief for his son; neither left any recognizable mark on his philosophy or the method of his contemplations.

If his grief could not unseat his philosophy, it is equally certain that his philosophy did not displace his grief. The problem had its grave moral interest. Religion, under various dispensations, had acted as a

tonic to sufferers, but never as an anæsthetic. In Emerson religion had been raised to an almost unheard-of power. Would that power counteract the ordinary human feelings in calamity? The answer was a plain negative. Emerson's religion quite failed to perform the office, and though most people would like the religion and its possessor all the more on account of the failure, the importance of the fact must not be overlooked. Religion confines its protectorship to its own estates, that is, to the parts of life which it rules; when the saint becomes a father, the fatherhood does not become a sharer in the inviolability of the saintship.

The letter to Carlyle which announces the death of the son opens with the following sentences: —

"My dear Friend, — I enclose a bill of exchange for forty-eight pounds sterling, payable by Baring Brothers and Co. after sixty days from the 25th of February.

"This sum is part of a payment from Little and Brown on account of sales of your London *French Revolution* and of *Chartism*."

Business matter of this kind consumes many paragraphs in the earlier letters of Carlyle and Emerson; indeed, it may be doubted whether dollars and pounds sterling ever before chinked so persistently in the correspondence of two philosophers. Emerson had proposed and superintended the issue of the "French Revolution," the "Miscellanies" (in four volumes), and "Chartism" by willing but cautious and delaying American publishers. The "astonishing enclosures" from the "surprising man" were subjects of wonder, even of tears on one occasion, in the little household

in Cheyne Row whose poverty dishonored England. These exertions in behalf of Carlyle, continued for years with the utmost fidelity, humility, and amenity, are perhaps the highest proof offered by Emerson of the rarity of his disinterestedness. Large and immediate sacrifices half repay us by the inspiration of their largeness, half console us by the rapidity of their passage: the real test comes in the performance of services, which are at once unending and discontinuous, in which the footings are large while the items are trivial. Emerson, a man to whom his time was his freehold, patiently submitted for years to the invasion and overrunning of that estate by petty, uncongenial, mercantile negotiations with their fated accompaniments of delay, disappointment, and cross-purposes. A mere trifle such as the advance of money from his own pocket is treated by the reader with a negligence which implies the culmination of homage.

The first volume of "Essays" was published in March, 1841, by James Munroe and Company, of Boston. A second series followed in 1844. The first volume of his poems did not come out till 1847.

CHAPTER III

THE WESTERING WHEEL

In the last part of the year 1846 Emerson received a letter from an English acquaintance, Mr. Alexander Ireland, who urged him to come to England and deliver courses of lectures in response to invitations to be obtained from various organizations in the English counties. Mr. Ireland had been Emerson's guide in Edinburgh in 1833, and united the practical gifts which made him "the king of all friends and helpful agents" with a "sweetness and *bonhomie*" that convinced Emerson that "a pool of honey" lay "about his heart." The invitation found the lecturer in one of those moods of suspense and stagnation incidental to men who depend on stimuli which they cannot control. Emerson had, as he says, "a good deal of domestic immoveableness — being fastened down by wife and children, by books and studies, by pear trees and apple trees," but his need, in his homely phrase, of "a whip for his top," seconded by importunities from Mr. Ireland and impulsions from his wife, proved more than a counter-weight to his objections. His name was known in England to an extent that surprises those who realize the slowness with which it was traversing America. Applications for lectures "flowed in" to the rejoicing Mr. Ireland, and Emerson's time had to be safeguarded by refusals.

"So," says Emerson, "I took my berth in the packet-

ship Washington Irving and sailed from Boston on Tuesday, 5th October, 1847." On the 22d of October, he reached Liverpool, and five days afterward, wrote to his wife from London.

"Dear Lidian: . . . I found at Liverpool after a couple of days a letter which had been once there seeking me (and once returned to Manchester before it reached my hands) from Carlyle addressed to 'R. W. E. on the instant he lands in England,' conveying so hearty a welcome and so urgent an invitation to house and hearth that I could no more resist than I could gravitation; and finding that I should not be wanted for a week in the lecture-rooms, I came hither on Monday, and, at ten at night, the door was opened to me by Jane Carlyle, and the man himself was behind her with a lamp in the entry. They were very little changed from their old selves of fourteen years ago (in August), when I left them at Craigenputtock. 'Well,' said Carlyle, 'here we are, shovelled together again.' The floodgates of his talk are quickly opened, and the river is a great and constant stream. We had large communication that night until nearly one o'clock, and at breakfast next morning it began again. At noon or later, we went together, Carlyle and I, to Hyde Park and the palaces (about two miles from here), to the National Gallery, and to the Strand, — Carlyle melting down all Westminster and London into his talk and laughter as he walked. . . . An immense talker he is, and altogether as extraordinary in his conversation as in his writing. . . . Carlyle and his wife live on beautiful terms. Nothing can be more engaging than their ways."

One feels that the cherished doctrine of the "fatality" of perceptions is somewhat discredited by this felicitous mistake.

Another brief passage on Carlyle must be set down. "His sneers and scoffs are thrown in every direction. He breaks every sentence with a scoffing laugh, — 'windbag,' 'monkey,' 'donkey,' 'bladder'; and let him describe whom he will, it is always 'poor fellow.' I said, 'What a fine fellow are you to bespatter the whole world with this oil of vitriol!' 'No man,' he replied, 'speaks truth to me.'"

Emerson's lecture courses in the provinces, which occupied the months of November and December, were received with a favor which indicates either a rare understanding on the part of provincial citizenship in England or a faculty — still more rare and still less English — of deriving pleasure from the unintelligible. His first course, delivered before the members of the Manchester Athenæum, comprised some of the lectures later printed in "Representative Men." The next series, given in the Manchester Mechanics' Institution, included "Eloquence," "Domestic Life," "Reading," and "The Superlative in Manners and Literature." In December, lectures were read in Derby, Sheffield, Nottingham, Birmingham, Preston, Leicester, Chesterfield, and Worcester, — names blank enough in the distant recital, but each touched, in its own hour, with the glow of novelty. The fulness with which the lectures were reported in Manchester became an embarrassment to Emerson, who was too sensitive or too scrupulous to wish to repeat discourses already offered to the public

in abridged form through the columns of the newspapers.

The tone of the newspaper critiques may be inferred from citations given in Moncure D. Conway's volume. Some extracts revel in those valueless superlatives which merely show that a roaming love of hyperbole has found a new bivouac, but the praise in others has the partial indecisiveness which attests sincerity. The doubter is sometimes gradually convinced, and the very indifference and carelessness of delivery which was first cited in censure is later converted into a grace. The following sketch of physique, at the end of an effusive paragraph, is almost disconcerting in the rudeness of its objectivity: "He is a thin, tall man, apparently about forty-five, with an oval Yankee countenance, rather sallow and emaciated, and a very prominent Wellington nose." The extracts as a whole confirm the impression that Emerson's *quality* was far more apprehensible than his intelligence, and that this quality was more appreciable in his person and his voice than in the bulk of his published writings.

On his lecturing trips in America, it was Emerson's practice to reject private hospitality, and to seek independence, if not comfort, at the hotel. In England, he writes to his wife: "I find many kind friends and have given up my caprice of not going to private houses, and scarcely go to any other. At Nottingham, I was the guest, on four nights, of four different friends." He finds everywhere "the same profuse kindness."

Emerson appears to have been the best, though possibly not the most assiduous or the most talkative, of

sight-seers. It may be doubted whether an equal wealth and variety of material had ever before been presented to a curiosity so capacious and, in its own fashion, so deep. The mind of this scholar-mystic had matured to a point where suggestiveness was universal. The items in the "Journals" are curiously diverse. In Worcester, it is the cathedral that attracts; at Leeds and Bradford, it is the black sheep; at Halifax, it is carpet mills offering vistas like church aisles; at Birmingham it is a milk-cart drawn by two dogs; at Bridlington (presumably) it is a young man with a skin of hard scales like an armadillo; in Edinburgh, it is De Quincey; in London it is a Chartist meeting, or a lecture by Richard Owen with his powerful face and surgical smile, or a *bon-mot* of Sydney Smith's about a giraffe with two yards of sore throat; at Oxford it is a manuscript of Plato bearing date A.D. 896. No doubt this power to be sincerely interested in many things helps to explain the surprising facility with which this reserved American with his modest fame made his way into all circles, including the highest social life: good auditors never lack opportunities for the display of their accomplishment.

There is one passage in a letter to Mrs. Emerson, written at Manchester, which must be quoted both for its intrinsic interest and for the substantial comfort it affords to people who doubt whether Emerson showed the normal interest of good men in the physical misery of strangers: "My dearest little Edie, to tell you the truth, costs me many a penny day by day. I cannot go up the street but I shall see some woman in rags, with a little creature just of Edie's size and age, but in coarsest

ragged clothes and barefooted, stepping beside her; and I look curiously into *her* Edie's face, with some terror lest it should resemble *mine*, and the far-off Edie wins from me the halfpence for this near one. Bid Ellen and Edie thank God they were born in New England, and bid them speak the truth, and do the right forever and ever, and I hope they and theirs will not stand barefooted in the mud on a bridge in the rain to beg of passengers." That the charitable act is quasi-parental, and is viewed, in a way, as a payment of accident insurance, does not prevent the passage from ranking among the loveliest and most endearing of Emerson's self-unfoldings.

The references to the children in the correspondence of these months are warm and tender: they even show signs of a progressing intimacy. "Love to all the darlings at home, whom I daily and nightly behold." "Many kisses, many blessings, to the little and the least." "All these touching anecdotes and now drawings and letters of my darlings duly come, and to my great joy."

He is often tempted "to run ignominiously away from Britain and France" to see his children again. It is a point well worth noting in these home letters that Emerson, whose impatience of any emphasis on the material side of hospitality is often manifested, is urgent, almost pathetic, in his petition to his wife that a young Englishman who may visit Concord in the winter shall find a fire in his bedchamber, and be served duly with bread and wine at 9 or 10 P.M.

In February, 1848, Emerson read lectures in Glasgow

and Edinburgh. In the latter town he met De Quincey, a gentle, entreating figure, not destined to fulfil his hope of seeing something on the scale of York Minster, and John Wilson (Christopher North), whose lectures as Emerson declares, with his ineffable tranquillity, "have really no merit." He was introduced to Francis Jeffrey, whose inadequacy is politely suggested, and to other personages of the day whose names have lost their resonance. The air of indulgence toward literary men in Emerson's letters and journals of the time contrasts oddly with the earnest receptiveness of his attitude toward the men — and the facts — of science. He had left behind the young man of 1833–34 for whom a few refulgent literary personalities had constituted the worth of Europe. In his present phase literature is almost ranked with aristocracy among powers whose virtue is chiefly emblematic. At Edinburgh he sat to David Scott, the painter, "a sincere great man," whose likeness of Emerson either suffers greatly in the reproduction or requires the trained eye for its proper valuation. On his way to London, he spent an hour and a half with Wordsworth, whose table-talk he disparages by undertaking to furnish as good himself; on which it may be remarked that the test of inadequacy here offered is not wholly conclusive; that Wordsworth was nearly seventy-eight years old, and that Emerson's demand for amusement was in its way as imperative as that of a Parisian beauty.

He arrived in London on March 1, and took lodgings with his English publisher, John Chapman, in a house afterwards distinguished by the occupancy of George

Eliot. Carlyle, Richard Milnes, and the American Minister, Mr. Bancroft, were prodigal of introductions, and we have an Englishman's own testimony to the fact that Emerson "took place at once as one of the conspicuous figures of the London season." London, too avid of diversion not to be tolerant of peculiarity — even the peculiarity of modesty — opened its jealous and exclusive doors to the half-known New Englander for whom Carlyle was voucher. In such circles Emerson could not be facile, but he had, we should infer, a certain address in the right use and proper limitation of his very maladjustments, and he seems to have been neither unhappy nor unvalued. With his proneness to exaggerate his disabilities, he had written to his wife from Manchester: "You must not think that any change has come over me, and that my awkward and porcupine manners are ameliorated by English air"; and he writes again from London: "Pray, after this ostentation of my fashionable acquaintance, do you believe that my rusticities are smoothed down, and my bad manners mended? Not in the smallest degree."

Emerson, of course, could not measure the effect of his face and voice in making way for him in high-bred companies, in filling blanks, and in excusing shortages. The sentiment expressed by the diarist, Crabb Robinson, was probably not exceptional: "It was with a feeling of predetermined dislike that I had the curiosity to look at Emerson at Lord Northampton's a fortnight ago; when, in an instant, all my dislike vanished. He has one of the most interesting countenances I ever beheld — a combination of intelligence and sweetness that

quite disarmed me." When the Barings gave a dinner in Emerson's honor, Carlyle bluntly records that "nobody minded him much"; but Emerson, we may guess, did not mind the not being minded, and the Barings could probably distinguish between that assimilative — shall we say pasturing? — silence of Emerson and the dumbness of discomfort and alienation.

From the excellent letters to his wife which brighten many pages of Mr. Cabot's "Memoir," we snatch a few threads here and there. He found Milnes "made of sugar"; he heard at the Geological Society the best debate he had come upon in England; he was elected to the Athenæum Club; he saw Macready as Lear and Mrs. Butler (Fanny Kemble) as Cordelia; he watched the handsome and courteous Prince Albert with that passing condescension to royalty which is excusable even in a sage; he notes, with some particularity, the good looks of the women; he found in Lady Morgan "a sort of fashionable or London edition of Aunt Mary"; he saw Rothschild "in flesh and blood"; he was delighted with the talk of Sir Charles Fellowes, who brought home the Lycian marbles; he found Froude (at Exeter College, Oxford) "a noble youth, to whom my heart warms"; he dined with Dickens, at Forster's, and forgot himself to the extent of liking the author of the "poor Pickwick stuff" very well. With the social — or unsocial — Tennyson (a man as to whose writings he could not keep his opinion stationary) he was "contented at once." He noted the "quiet, *sluggish* sense and strength" (the italics are ours), and found him a Hawthorne with less shyness and more fluency. He

found in Leigh Hunt manners surpassed only by De Quincey's; in Macaulay a "wonderful vivacity," meaning, as it would seem, vigor or life; in George Eliot, then undistinguished, "a calm, clear spirit."

The dynastic changes of 1848 in France, which had thrown London and all Europe into sympathetic or apprehensive perturbation, did not prevent Emerson from crossing the Channel or interfere in an appreciable degree with the serenity of his twenty-five days (May 6–31) of reflective observation in that city. On May 15, within twenty-four hours, he saw the birth and decease of an attempted revolution. He had praised the English all the winter, with compensatory disparagement of France, but the French rose fast in his esteem during his sojourn in Paris. He liked the courtesy, the trimness or trigness of the very gamins, the invitations to entertainment which made all Paris seem a continuation of the theatre, the variety of solicitations to the eye; in short, he is thankful for Paris (the Paris of 1848) as a beneficent anodyne or anæsthetic which the charity of destiny had provided as a lenitive to possible calamities. This choice of the Mænad or Valkyrie as sick-nurse is indicative of the fearlessness of the patient.

He was open, however, to an opposite cast of impressions. At the clubs he found the men "in terrible earnest." Again he writes: "The deep sincerity of the speakers, who are agitating social, not political, questions, and who are studying how to secure a fair share of bread to every man, and to get God's justice done through the land, is very good to hear." The "Journals" contain this shrewd epigram, called forth by the spread of

thought among the democrats: "The most important word the Age has given to the vocabulary is 'Blouse.'"

On May 13, without reference to Paris, he sets down this passage, remarkable for the haughtiness of its recoil and for the deep bell-stroke whose muffled peal is audible in the concluding sentences: —

"What can the brave and strong genius of C. himself avail? What can his praise, what can his blame, avail me, when I know that if I fall or if I rise, there still awaits me the inevitable joke? The day's Englishman must have his joke, as duly as his bread. God grant me the noble companions whom I have left at home who value merriment less, and virtues and powers more. If the English people have owed to their House of Commons this damnable derision, I think they have paid an over-price for their liberties and empire. But when I balance the attractions of good and evil, when I consider what facilities, what talents a little vice would furnish, then rise before me not these laughers, but the dear and comely forms of honour and genius and piety in my distant home, and they touch me with chaste palms moist and cold, and say to me, You are ours."

Our earliest acquisitions are those of which the appreciation is tardiest, and this passage indicates that Emerson in mature life came to value more and more those local and ancestral impregnations which, in the first warmth of his revolt from tradition, he had allowed himself unduly to depreciate. Boston had taught him to be cosmopolite; the world was now converting him into a Bostonian.

Before leaving London, Emerson had slowly and un-

willingly brought himself to consent to the delivery of six lectures on his return to that city; he had been "much pressed, and came at last to have a feeling that not to do it was a kind of skulking." The course was given in June, 1848, at the Portman Square Literary and Scientific Institution, and comprised the following titles: I. Powers and Laws of Thought; II. Relation of Intellect to Natural Science; III. Tendencies and Duties of Men of Thought; IV. Politics and Socialism; V. Poetry and Eloquence; VI. Natural Aristocracy. The appalling dulness of these titles — to say nothing of the engrossment with French affairs — half excuses the failure of London to avail itself largely of this opportunity, and the promised two hundred pounds of profit to the lecturer shrank to a scant eighty pounds in the sequel. The company, however, grew larger each day, and was starred with notabilities, titled and literary: the Duchess of Sutherland, the Duke of Argyle, Carlyle, and Barry Cornwall. "Carlyle, too," says Emerson, "makes loud Scottish-Covenanter gruntings of laudation, or at least of consideration when anything strikes him, to the edifying of the attentive vicinity." A single eloquent, almost a pathetic, adverb assures us that "Jane Carlyle and Mrs. Bancroft honestly came." "The high price of the tickets," as Dr. Garnett says, "caused Emerson to be taxed with forsaking the middle class"; and he cleared himself of tuft-hunting or pound-hunting by delivering three "expiatory" lectures, at democratic prices, in Exeter Hall. The Duchess of Sutherland and other titled persons invited him to their houses, and showed a good sense and good nature which made

coronets forgivable. Their relation to Emerson presented the rare case of an aristocracy valued by a man of thought for intrinsic merit.

What effect has the season of familiar intercourse produced upon that peculiar Carlyle-Emerson relation, in which distance had powerfully aided two men to keep near to each other? To speak first of Jane Carlyle, whose "honest" comings to Portman Square were so affectionately chronicled. She had learned in less than three months to speak slightingly of Emerson, — an art in which her progress was proverbially rapid; she had found out that Emerson had no ideas (except mad ones) that he had not got out of Carlyle. She appears to have had some difficulty in forgiving an inadvertence of destiny which had involved an unexpected half-hour's tête-à-tête with her American friend. Carlyle, too, has his disenchanting candors. "We had immense talking with him here, but found he did not give us much to chew the cud upon — found, in fact, that he came with the rake rather than the shovel. He is a pure high-minded man, but I think his talent is not quite so high as I had anticipated." A little later comes the following commentary: "very *exotic;* of smaller dimensions, too, and differed much from me as a gymnosophist sitting idle on a flowery bank may do from a wearied worker and wrestler passing that way with many of his bones broken. Good of him I could get none, except from his friendly looks and elevated exotic polite ways, and he would not let me sit silent for a minute. Solitary, on that side, too, then? Be it so, if so it must be. But we will try a little farther." After parting, he relaxes his rigor a little. He

even makes the princely concession of "some indisputable natural faculty," which the American reader, glad by this time to see his countryman acquitted of imbecility, accepts in humble thankfulness. But the earlier valuation is not rescinded.

These are chilling and disquieting records, but it would be neither generous nor wise to exaggerate their significance. The temperature at 5 Cheyne Row was noted for extremes. Almost everybody and everything that had committed the imprudence of being born in the same era with the Carlyles had its turn of depreciation in that unsparing domicile, but the love and respect which could not inhibit these strictures had the strength sometimes to outlive them. Carlyle's letters to Emerson after the English visit show no abatement of sincerity and, if anything, an increase of regard; indeed, from this time forward, the overtures and urgencies come mainly from Chelsea, and encounter, on Emerson's side, an evident slackening, not in cordiality, but in epistolary zeal.

To Emerson, as we have already hinted, Carlyle had now almost laid aside the prophet and taken on the aspect of a Niagara or Vesuvius, a great reservoir of turbulent primitive force. Emerson liked power only less than insight, and the early affection he had formed for Carlyle survived the extinction of part at least of the grounds for its existence. He did not lose his intrepidity in the neighborhood of the Titan, rebuked him for encouraging too abject a discipleship in a clever young Espinasse, and even aroused the lion in his friend by a hint of dissent on the sensitive topic of Cromwell. Their

relation was well summarized by Carlyle in a letter written in 1850: "Though I see well enough what a great deep cleft divides us, in our ways of practically looking at this world, — I see also (as probably you do yourself) where the rock-strata, miles deep, unite again: and the two souls are at one."

Emerson sailed from Liverpool on July 15, and reached America before the end of the month; he found the road from Liverpool to New York "long, crooked, rough, rainy, and windy." The ten months had been packed with particolored life, with business, observation, and social intercourse; they had been animated perhaps rather than happy; he had sighed for his children, he had chafed at his work, he had felt no doubt the intensified solitude of the recluse in grand assemblies. But the rare opportunities for observation, the rare provocations to thought, had been grasped with an incomparable avidity. The harvest was garnered in "English Traits."

The last decades of Emerson's life were punctuated by the appearance of rather short volumes at long intervals: "Representative Men," 1850; "English Traits," 1856; "Conduct of Life," 1860; "Society and Solitude," 1870; "Letters and Social Aims," 1875. A later chapter will deal critically with these volumes.

Brief mention must be made of the "Massachusetts Quarterly Review," a periodical of high aims, insufficient basis, and brief life, to which Emerson contributed a prospectus and on whose covers his name was permitted to stand for a short time in the excellent company of Theodore Parker and J. E. Cabot. Even these strictly

nominal services were concluded after the fourth number, and the editorship was relinquished, in form, as well as fact, to Theodore Parker.

In the decade from 1850 to 1860, which saw the preparing and publishing of the works reviewed in the last chapter, Emerson passed from his forty-seventh to his fifty-seventh year. Of the three children, Ellen in the same period, grew from eleven to twenty-one years, Edith from nine to nineteen, Edward, the youngest child and now the only son, from six to sixteen, facts better worth specifying than many matters whose dignity would be less subject to cavil. The quiet of his Concord home was broken only by lecture trips of enlarging circuit, of increased effort and hardship, but of compensating variety and instructiveness, carried out with a characteristic mixture of fortitude and impatience. The obligation to lecture was peremptory, as he was cramped in money matters by an unfortunate investment in Vermont railroad stock which afforded no dividends. The barn door is neatly shut in the following caustic sentence: "I took such pains not to keep my money in the house, but to put it out of the reach of burglars by buying stock, and had no guess that I was putting it into the hands of these very burglars now grown wiser and standing dressed as Railway Directors."

Emerson's mother, who had long lived in his house, the object of that tender fealty which was his fashion of domestic love, died peacefully in 1853.

The specific point of interest in this period, however, is the maturing of his hostility to slavery, a phase of his career for which his lovers are perennially grateful. Not

his life precisely, but the effect of his life, is completed by this development. To make the refutation of the charge of lotos-eating or dilettantism conclusive, to crown and solidify the demonstration of his manhood, it was necessary that on the great moral struggle which rent America in his lifetime, the stand of her noblest son should be decisive and emphatic. Less than this might have doubtfully sufficed for sedulous students and unquestioning admirers, but not for the satisfaction of an exigent and suspicious world. As the case now stands, we are not constrained to accept a mere paper currency on the assurance of its convertibility into gold at some unspecified time and place: we are paid in actual bright doubloons and louis d'or that ring cheerily upon the counter.

The situation is the more interesting that Emerson's deterrents from activity were almost as powerful as his incentives, and that a modest change in the course of American history might have confirmed him in the relatively passive attitude he had maintained from 1825 to 1850. It is with a certain dramatic tension that we watch the gradual drifting of the boat from the languor of the side channel into the speed and vehemence of the middle current.

Emerson's power of indignation at a public wrong had been put beyond question in 1838 by the private letter he addressed to Martin Van Buren, then President of the United States, in protest against the expulsion of the Cherokees from their lands under the alleged warrant of a fraudulent treaty. This letter is perhaps the most remarkable illustration of the wrath of the meek, of the

imperiousness of the humble, to be found in the annals of politics or of literature. Careful in the main of outward forms, it abandons itself in essentials to the stress of a passion and a daring of which, in a quiet mystic like Emerson, the fact alone could have revealed the possibility. There are sentences like levin-bolts that kindle where they smite. "The soul of man, the justice, the mercy that is the heart's heart in all men, from Maine to Texas, does abhor this business." "How could we call the conspiracy that should crush these poor Indians our government, or the land that was cursed by their parting and dying imprecations our country, any more? You, sir, will bring down that renowned chair in which you sit into infamy if your seal is set to this instrument of perfidy: and the name of this nation, hitherto the sweet omen of religion and liberty, will stink to the world."

The crash of these words, the peals from this hidden Sinai, are as heartening and vivifying as they are formidable. It will be noted that the terror and pity centre about the United States rather than the wronged Cherokees. In Emerson's view, there was a victim in every act of crime, but he assigned that post to the criminal, not the sufferer.

Emerson, in his brief pastorate, in 1830–31, twice permitted abolitionists to lecture or preach in the Second Church. In 1837, he delivered, by request, in the Second Church at Concord, an anti-slavery lecture of an irritating mildness. He disliked the negro; he disliked the abolitionist; and, between these two dislikes, his condemnation of the planter, though sincere, lost much of its incisiveness. He suspected that slavery was

symptomatic, and that abolition was a treatment of the symptoms. He thought that the essence of slavery was reproduced wherever one man — an abolitionist very possibly — utilized the hard labor of another to secure leisure or luxury to himself. In 1845, he had urged his fellow-curators of the Concord Lyceum to invite Wendell Phillips to address the citizens on slavery. In the same year, he served on the committee which expressed the opinion of Massachusetts on the expulsion of Samuel Hoar from South Carolina in rather mildly disapproving resolutions. He roused himself with some difficulty to a tepid sense of the undesirability of the annexation of Texas, the fate of Texas interesting him far less than the stand of Massachusetts. It was sometimes the mere cast of a die whether Emerson was to view such events with the dispassionate remoteness of the annalist and sociologist, view them as effects of historic necessity and as sources of undesigned benefits, or whether he should judge them by the motives of their perpetrators. In fact, he is almost capable of approving the act and censuring the performer in the same breath.[1]

On August 1, 1844, he had delivered in Concord a long address on the subject of the recently accomplished emancipation of the negroes in the British West Indies. The address, reprinted in the "Miscellanies," is admirable: rich in extended but always interesting narrative; revelling as might be foreseen in the opportunities for vivid concreteness with which the subject teemed; full of pity but sympathizing with the negro's joy almost

[1] See Cabot, II, 576–77.

more than with his pain; of a homely simplicity, a fireside tenderness, in parts; in parts, likewise, of a clarion-like resonance, if a clarion were adequate to suggest the brooding, thunderous undertones of the more exalted passages. But the point of immediate interest for us, the point which explains largely Emerson's previous backwardness or hesitating forwardness in the movement, is the immense encouragement he derives from the evidences of self-help, of independent worth, supplied by Toussaint L'Ouverture and other negroes. Emerson could tolerate slavery (in distant States) as long as slavery was the measure and definition of the negro's capacity, but any proof of the scantness of that measure, of the inaccuracy of that definition, was a summons to the forefront of the battle.

Emerson had possessed even in youth a sparingly exercised but authentic faculty for light, flicking, sweeping contempt, but the deeper and ampler note of passionate scorn which invades his pages at this period is a trait hardly revealed before the glowing letter on the Cherokees. In 1846, he writes in the "Journals": —

"If I were a member of the Massachusetts Legislature, I should propose to exempt all colored citizens from taxation because of the inability of the Government to protect them by passport out of its territory. It does not give the value for which they pay the tax.

"Also I should recommend that the executive wear no sword, and the office of general be abolished and the whole militia disbanded; for if these persons do not know that they pretend to be and to do somewhat which they are not and do not, Hoar of Concord, Walker of

the branded hand, Torrey the martyr, know that the sword of Massachusetts is a sword of lath or a turkey feather."

On reflection, one is not at all surprised that a certain Archbishop Laud had some trouble with the man's ancestors.

There are sharp words for South Carolina at this time, but on the whole Emerson's lenity toward the planter is conspicuous and consistent. His feeling for the Southerner, which dated back to his Harvard days, was a mixture, perhaps, of the esteem which he felt in 1848 for the English nobility in its ancestral seats with the equally authentic relish awakened in him by the Californian rough and dare-devil of the same epoch. The two characters were not so far apart in Emerson's view, the gentleman holding to the bully the same relation that the stamped and minted coin, adapted to civil uses, holds to the raw nugget. It is far from surprising, therefore, that the act which kindled his unappeasable wrath should have emanated not directly from the planters themselves but from the Government at Washington supported by Daniel Webster. Why was the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 so detestable to a mind which had kept its equanimity in the presence of the fact of slavery and of the invasion of Mexico? Because it obliged the Northern man to catch slaves, because it was an interference from without with Emerson's right, with any man's right, to obey his own conscience. It attacked the jurisdiction of the moral sentiment. It is doubtful if the shrewdest of Emerson's friends could have foreseen the energy of the reaction which this measure was to

arouse in that serene and philosophic temper. "There is infamy in the air. I have a new experience. I wake in the morning with a painful sensation, which I carry about all day, and which, when traced home, is the odious remembrance of that ignominy which has fallen on Massachusetts, which robs the landscape of beauty, and takes the sunshine out of every hour." He goes on in the same address (delivered at Concord on May 3, 1851) to define the Act of Congress of September 18, 1850, as "a law which every one of you will break on the earliest occasion, — a law which no man can obey or abet the obeying without loss of respect and forfeiture of the name of a gentleman."

This is fiery language for a reader of Plotinus. The Musketaquid is a peaceful stream, but it had its hour when its banks echoed to the crack of musketry. Bitter, even tragic, as the tone of the orator is, it is yet full of that sombre exhilaration which attends the mustering of great, half-unsuspected forces, in response to the bugle-call of some imperative occasion. Emerson is oppressed, no doubt, but something in him has been set free which owed to this crisis the possibility of freedom, and the emancipation tingles through all his veins like joy. He "frees his mind" no less surely in the loftier than in the vulgar sense.

The slightness of government in Emerson's eyes, or, rather, his view that its sole hold on respectability lay in its adhesion to virtue, is brought out by the entire absence of reluctance and of compunction in the counsels of disobedience which he sets forth. Away with hesitation, with squeamishness, with apology; disobedience

is no painful necessity, no excusable license; it is duty, privilege, honor. Neither 1776 nor 1789 shall stay for a moment the visitation of justice on 1850. Here is a square issue for once between the state and the personal conscience, and the state is sent about its business like a footman who has been saucy to his master. In all of which the soul of the reader irrepressibly exults.

A personal disillusion added its bitterness to the difficulty of the crisis. For many years, since boyhood, indeed, Daniel Webster had been to Emerson a wonder, an inspiration, and — to re-apply a phrase of his own — a "delicious torment." The greatness of that man's constitution — the whole virtue of Webster may be designated in a double sense as *constitutional* — and the mediocrity of his aims, and even, by severe tests, of his intellect, gave stringent exercise to the mind of an admirer in whom strong loyalty and fatally clear perceptions contended with each other for predominance. From time to time he had felt constrained to re-try the case of Webster in his own mind, and the idolater in him had been heavily taxed to rescue his saint from the iconoclast. Webster himself is too often on the side of the assailants, but up to the fatal year 1850 Emerson had known how to subdue, if not to silence, his misgivings; in 1843, when Webster was a guest at his house in Concord, his portrait is sketched with a tenderness that borders on solicitude. Having proved almost too laboriously that Webster is "a very true and admirable man," he murmurs, under his breath as it were, "I only wish he would never truckle."

No doubt this arrested or adjourned censure added

its quantum to the splendors of that powerful invective with which he turned upon Webster after the recreancy of March, 1850. His description in 1843 of Webster's wrath might be transferred almost literally to his own: "His splendid wrath, when his eyes became fires, is as good to see, so intellectual it is,and the wrath of the fact and cause he espouses." The situation was curious. The prostration of Webster became the occasion for the towering of the modest Emerson into hitherto undivined proportions. The remark, of course, applies only to his public capacities. Of Emerson, as of the different and inferior Swinburne, it may be affirmed that scorn and anger were needed to quicken their blood to that energy of flow which made them really sympathetic to average human nature.

Emerson's remedy for the general situation was the purchase of the slaves from their masters, at a cost, possibly, of two thousand million dollars. The proposal as viewed by posterity has a sufficiently practical look, since it is clearly thriftier to pay once in gold than to pay twice, in gold and in blood. The difficulty in such a proposition lay, no doubt, in the fact that the will to buy and the will to sell were neither of them forthcoming except in the train of an emotional and moral tension which would have made a mercantile settlement impracticable.

The speech was repeated in several towns in support of Dr. Palfrey's candidacy for Congress, and at Cambridge the outbreak of "hisses, shouts, and cat-calls" interrupted, and finally stopped, the delivery. Professor James B. Thayer, in a note to Mr. Cabot, writes: "There

never was a finer spectacle of dignity and composure than he presented. He stood with perfect quietness until the hubbub was over, and then went on with the next word. It was as if nothing had happened . . . and I cannot describe with what added weight the next words fell." At a later date, in Tremont Temple in 1861, he was again silenced by the mob, on which occasion he records in the "Journals" the following electrical sentence: "If I were dumb, yet I would have gone and mowed and muttered or made signs."

Emerson had already hailed in John Brown the rise of a personage in whom the half-famished instinct of hero-worship, that persisted in his constitution, could find aliment if not repletion. John Brown afforded him not only the grateful spectacle of human nature dispensing with government and aiding itself, but that for which the scholar-mystic had vainly hungered all his days, the application of primitive power to disinterested ends. When Brown lay in prison after the collapse of the Virginia project, Emerson uttered these words (removed ten years later from the printed address): "That new saint, than whom none purer or more brave was ever led by love of men into conflict and death — the new saint — awaiting his martyrdom, and who, if he shall suffer, will make the gallows glorious like the cross."

He welcomed the outbreak of war in 1861 with an enthusiasm which recalls the conduct of his grandfather, William Emerson, on the morning of the 19th of April, 1775. "Now we have a country again." "Declared war is vastly safer than war undeclared." It is a fact

worth considering that the actual presence of the deadly agencies did not modify but rather heightened his relish of the prospect. In the Charlestown Navy Yard, whither he had asked a friend to take him, "Sometimes," he said, "gunpowder smells good." Neither Bull Run nor Gettysburg disturbed the constancy of this mood. It is interesting to note that the comments on war which checker the "Journals" of the next quadrennium are commonly favorable, even where the justice of the cause is not in question; and it is doubtful if its horrors touched or interested him except as they offered a background to heroism. There is tremor rather of exultation than of grief in the words in which he describes the departure of the volunteers from Concord. The noble record of these Concord soldiers, for whose monument he gave the dedication address in 1867, touched him, to all appearance, very much as it stirred the heart of every generous son of Massachusetts. If there were a difference, it was expressible in the phrase that Emerson was tender to the brave. The romantic impulse which had formed his love of Scott and fed his love of Shakespeare, and which, suppressed in other forms, found its main outlet in imagery, no doubt even in this mature age irradiated war with a courtly glamour.

Meanwhile, the student and thinker in him was glad to have this baleful star brought within the range of his all-probing telescope. The prevalence of approval even in his passionless and deliberative hours is sufficiently remarkable. The war is a "great teacher," a "great reconciler," a "searcher of character," a "test of men"; it diffuses hardihood, it reverts to roots and foun-

dations, it excludes other evils, it promotes organization, it unlocks munificence, it revives patriotism. He humors his good neighbors now and then by admitting cursorily that the war is "dreadful," but it is evident that the aroma of gunpowder is still titillative. President Lincoln's conquest of his respect was gradual but sure, and his last doubts were dispelled by the Emancipation Proclamation. In January, 1862, he had gone to Washington to deliver an argument for emancipation before the Smithsonian Institution, and saw Lincoln, Seward, Chase, and other men of mark. The pinched, watchful, harassed temper of Washington, the half-shabby, half-forlorn aspect of men and things, is clearly imaged in the "Journal" of this visit, wherein facts are set down with a vivid plainness which attests the uselessness of rhetoric. "The President impressed me more favorably than I had hoped"; in these days, when it was a question of Lincoln, New Englanders were clearly thankful for small mercies. There is some doubt as to whether the President attended the lecture at the Smithsonian Institution, as asserted by Moncure D. Conway in his biography of Emerson.

In Boston, in September, 1862, Emerson delivered an address on the "Emancipation Proclamation," which ranks high among his patriotic discourses. The throb in this speech is continuous and noble; its movement is singularly untrammelled; impulse, rejoicing, seem to be always pouring fresh energies into the restrained style. The vibrating phrase, "Do not let the dying die," of which the context alone can attest the magnificence, glorifies this impassioned speech. At another celebra-

tion, on January 1, 1863, the famous "Boston Hymn" was read, the former advocate of purchase carrying all Boston with him in the famous outburst: —

> "Who is the owner? The slave is owner,
> And ever was. Pay him."

The patriotic documents of this period, 1844–67, which included speeches on the Sumner outrage and on the death of Lincoln, are valuable as literature and simply priceless as testimony. They are remarkable for their exhibition of the qualities the absence of which in Emerson's prose is often lamented, — the qualities of freedom, continuity, perspective, and clearness; they are not wanting in his esoteric virtues. As Emerson's philosophical defect is the failure to allow sufficiently for the frailty of average flesh, so his literary defect is the failure to allow sufficiently for the frailty of average intelligence. In narrative and in reasoning, which largely fill these addresses, he comes into closer relation with his fellows. More Bostonian, more ancestral, less peculiar, less Emersonian, than in his other works, he has here supplied the counterpoise and hence the justification for his peculiarity. The whole series is an exemplar of the moral sublime. Passages quite as exalted and much more spiritual are easily found in his other books, but in no other work is exaltation so happily combined with body. He is no longer content to make the air tingle; he makes the earth quake.

The language of these speeches is sometimes unbridled, but there is a saving restraint in the tone which sustains the high decorum proper to the man. The god descends to share in the earthly conflict, but Olympus rides with

him on his chariot. Never was a wrath so commanding, or so humble, as the wrath of Emerson.

The war had been fruitful in pecuniary embarrassment: books, lectures, Mrs. Emerson's property in Plymouth, had alike ceased to yield the accustomed revenue. In all emergencies, however, his friends justified his trust. Mr. Abel Adams, an old friend and sterling man of business, whose advice on railway investments had been more kind than wise, repented his error as if it had been a fault, and wished to pay the Harvard College expenses of Emerson's young son, Edward. Even the sensitive philosopher, so shy of benefits that he found it a little hard to take gifts even from his own family, was obliged to yield to his friend's generous inflexibility. A lovable note (quoted in Mr. Cabot's "Memoir"), urging Mr. Adams's attendance at a high festival in the Emerson household, is one of those cherished *guaranties* of which the faithful reader, however convinced, never feels that he can have too many.

The festival in question was the marriage of Emerson's second daughter, Edith, in 1865, to Colonel William H. Forbes. The event was the cause of various satisfactions, comprising, in due time, the birth of a little grandson, whose advent he welcomes in one of his gracious, priestlike, chiselled notes. Another benefit was the assumption by the efficient son-in-law of the charge of Emerson's pecuniary interests. Mr. Forbes released Emerson's property from the talons of a fraudulent agent whose "masterly and clear-headed statements of account" had consoled his employer for the paucity of dividends. Mr. Forbes not only disposed of this masterly

accountant, but assumed the charge of the business arrangements with regard to Emerson's books. Under this happy stimulus, the books developed money-making propensities, which, their parentage considered, he felt to be almost indecent, and the augmenting receipts left him aghast at his own rapacity.

A third happy consequence of this marriage was Emerson's entrance into closer relations with John M. Forbes, the father of his son-in-law. This gentleman, whose merits, though very great, ran entirely along the conventional lines of efficiency, uprightness, and benevolence, drew from Emerson a eulogy which would scarcely have seemed grudging had its subject been Thoreau or Carlyle. Indeed, neither Thoreau nor Carlyle would have been permitted to escape without some gentle intimation of their share in the infirmity of manhood. Infirmities, however, become unthinkable in the society of Mr. Forbes. The date of this eulogy is October, 1864, and a great war teaches thinkers to respect men of action. More than this, Emerson seems, in his later days, to have gained a new fellowship with excellence of the recognized and normal type. The hours of insight, which had made all society an impertinence, had become rarer and less controllable as the years advanced, and the search in hours of intercourse for mystic illumination which had once drawn him to men like Alcott and Thoreau had probably been checked by the infrequency of the successes. He lowered, no doubt, the plane of expectation, and found unexpected content in the fellowship and information he obtained on this lower level. At thirty, he would have regretted to find in Mr.

Forbes an inadequate Transcendentalist; at sixty, he was glad to find in him a brave, kind, and sane man. "Never," he exclaims in his orchestral style, "was such force, good meaning, good sense, good action combined with such domestic lovely behavior, and such modesty and persistent preference of others."

The change was aided possibly by a certain decrease in Emerson's dependence on mere beauty, and a heightened ability to extract nutriment from plain facts, the facts which the everyday man commands and dispenses. Charles Eliot Norton, returning from Europe with Emerson in 1873, writes thus: "Emerson was the greatest talker in the ship's company. He talked with all men, and yet was fresh and zealous for talk at night." On a trip to California, undertaken at the instance of the vigilant Mr. Forbes, he astonished his young companions by being "so agreeable all the time without getting tired." He seems clearly drawing closer to his kind. His increasing geniality was met halfway by their maturing reverence. Since 1850, he had had no fresh iconoclasms, and his old heresies, in politics and religion, were conquering and transforming his compatriots. Age itself is a kind of withdrawal, justifying the aloofness natural to his disposition, and the acknowledgment of the interval may have actually helped to shorten it. No person whose opinions are significant will conjecture for a moment that Emerson had relinquished his old ideals: nothing had occurred but a shift of means, dependent in part upon altered capacity.

In 1863, by appointment of President Lincoln, he served as visitor to the Academy at West Point; in which

function Mr. John Burroughs, destined later to write one of the few memorable essays upon Emerson, mistook him at first sight for an inquisitive farmer. In 1864 he was a member of the School Committee in Concord. The singular evolution of mystic into committeeman and board member was completed by his election to the Board of Overseers of Harvard College. The same institution conferred upon him the honorary title of LL.D. In 1865, he had delivered the commemoration address at Cambridge on the close of the war, and, in 1867, Phi Beta Kappa, after a recuperation of thirty years, felt warranted in inviting him for a second time to deliver the annual address.

Conservatism, always slow to believe that its rebels are irreclaimable, reported at this time that Emerson had abjured his heterodoxies — an assertion which he authorized his son to contradict. The suggestion was foolish enough, but the comment with which Mr. Cabot qualifies his refutation deserves quoting: "What was true, I think, was that when his mind was quiescent, and nothing happened to stir up reflection, his feelings went back with complacency to the sentiments and the observances of his youth." To change the form of explanation slightly, Emerson had, in childhood and early manhood, classed certain high endowments — a religious spirit for example — with eyes and ears and lips and muscles as part of the universal, necessary, and in a sense negligible equipment of mankind, as things, in short, which man could hand over to the ordering of nature. Later on, probably, when he came to see that human nature and the religious spirit were separable

entities, he set a rather higher value on the expedients mankind has devised for fostering their union; he saw merit in religious education. On one occasion, this feeling involved him in distinct opposition to his normal and proper attitude. When the Overseers of Harvard were requested to abolish the compulsory attendance at morning prayers in chapel, the division was so close that Emerson's affirmative vote, it is said, would have been decisive. He voted for compulsory attendance. The matter is not grave, but the incident is one which the true lover of Emerson can hardly read or recount without a tinge of melancholy. Though not a blot, it is a blur upon the clearness of his record. No wise man will question the nobility of his motives; but, in this instance, the world had a right to more than impeccable motives from its great instructor in self-reliance; it had a right to a specific stand.

For the last twenty years or so of his life Emerson was distinguished for the regularity of his attendance at the "Saturday Club," an organization of Boston notabilities, established in the late fifties, whose members dined together informally on the last Saturday of each month at the Parker House. This body, which included Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes, Hawthorne, Motley, Agassiz, Sumner, and others, is said by Dr. Holmes to have clustered around Emerson as a nucleus — the last form which the seer's benefactions to his fellow-men could have been thought likely to adopt. Be that as it may, Emerson seems to have derived real enjoyment from his participation in these dinners. That participation took the form of low-toned, measured, meditated speech and of a si-

lence hardly less clear-cut. Emerson might be described as an eloquent listener, and his very presence was enkindling. In improvised speeches, his success was rare, and Mr. Cabot tells of his rising at the "Saturday Club" on the occasion of the Shakespeare anniversary, "looking about him tranquilly for a minute or two, and then sitting down; serene and unabashed, but unable to say a word upon a subject so familiar to his thoughts from boyhood."

Some time about the year 1870, word came to Emerson of a London publisher's intention to bring out a volume of his uncollected papers. At the intercession of the obliging Moncure D. Conway, the publisher abandoned this project, in return for an engagement on Emerson's part to prepare a similar collection, adding some new pieces, and consenting to its simultaneous issue in England and America. The work was slowly and laboriously advancing when, in the summer of 1872, the outbreak of fire in his dwelling-house at Concord resulted in the ruin of his house, the dispersion of his papers, and the temporary derangement of his health. The zeal of friendly neighbors, aroused from sleep by his call at half past five in the morning, saved furniture and books and the great bulk of his papers, but Emerson, who had walked about, partly dressed, in the rain, in the effort to collect papers, now literally fugitive, atoned for this rashness by an attack of fever.

The doctrine of "Compensation" did not forget its defender. Several touching and agreeable incidents revealed the esteem in which Emerson was held by neighbors and remoter friends. A check for five thou-

sand dollars was handed to Emerson by Francis Cabot Lowell a day or two after the fire, and, shortly after, a "friendly conspiracy," organized by Le Baron Russell, raised very readily another sum of eleven thousand six hundred and twenty dollars, and even succeeded in the much more delicate undertaking of inducing the grateful but sensitive Emerson to accept it. Judge Hoar, who was made the bearer of the bank check, understood the danger of carrying a spark into a powder-mill. He told Emerson "by way of prelude, that some of his friends had made him [Emerson] treasurer of an association who wished him to go to England and examine Warwick Castle and other noted houses that had been recently injured by fire, in order to get the best ideas possible for restoration, and then apply them to a house which the association was formed to restore in this neighborhood." Emerson "wondered" and "melted," and, in this state of liquefaction, was unable to cope with the jesuitry of Judge Hoar. The fire began to seem to him "more wonderful in its salvages than in its ruins," and the gift aroused "new aspirations in the old heart toward a better deserving." Even at sixty-nine he is wakened to new expectations of good from human intercourse — so stout was that ancient and often baffled hope of ideal companionship in this hardened lover of his kind.

From the shock of this fire, Mr. Cabot dates the decline in memory and in mental grasp. Refreshment of some kind was clearly imperative, and, on October 24, 1872, he embarked for England accompanied by his eldest daughter, Ellen, the mainstay of his declining years. They were met in London by the son Edward, then a

student at St. Thomas's Hospital in that city. Emerson met the aging and saddened Carlyle, was gazed at fixedly, and taken, literally, to that great, unquiet heart. He ate more readily, praised the "good, strong, English sleep," was shy of company, tasted the sights meekly but charily, and was faithful, as far as in him lay, to his own pretty motto that "*idlesse* is the business of age." At Canterbury, he proposed to send for his wife and to spend his last days in the shadow of the great archbishopric. In Paris, "a happy week" was spent in the society of James Russell Lowell and John Holmes, and, zigzagging between train and boat, the party arrived, at the close of November, in Rome, where the daughter of an old Massachusetts friend welcomed them to her beautiful villa high upon the Cælian Hill. The last days of the year found them in Alexandria and Cairo.

Throughout the journey Emerson seems to have been gracious, passive, planless, a little abstracted, casually fond of people, capable of passing sallies of interest and vivacity, with retreats into melancholy that strengthened the desire of home. Egypt, which is decay petrified, could hardly convince an invalid that his own abeyances were temporary. After a thirty days' trip up the Nile, the party returned to Cairo, took ship for Italy, found attentions and cordialities in Rome, and in Florence met Hermann Grimm, who declared that Emerson had the aspect of steel. At Paris, Lowell and John Holmes renewed their enchantments, and the whimsicality of fate brought the American seer into momentary contact with Ernest Renan and Henri Taine. By April

fifth, the date of the return to London, Emerson's health was greatly improved, and his revived power of memory permitted him to accept the daily invitations to lunches and dinners which proved that the power of remembering was not wholly extinct in that whirling capital. Even in his old age this untitled American could jot down the names of three dukes in succession in a list of the persons encountered in the visit. He met other men in whom the world and he felt deeper interest: Carlyle, again, with whom he had "real comfort" — a phrase of retrospective significance; Browning, whom he succeeded in liking in spite of that gentleman's unfortunate crotchet as to the presence of poetic gifts in a certain Shelley; and Ruskin, whose lecture he heartily admired, but whose jeremiads on the subject of prevalent social ills he met with a round rebuke. There were visits to Stratford and Edinburgh, and the homeward voyage was brightened by the society of Charles Eliot Norton, who honored in two noble quatrains the advent of Emerson's seventieth birthday in the course of the passage.

On arriving at Concord, he was driven to the new house built on the old site in the old fashion. There was much honest rejoicing of which no one should speak without respect, but the forms taken by the popular welcome to this grave and reserved man — a band, a school procession, and a triumphal arch — make the reader thankful for the omission of pyrotechnics.

Meanwhile, the publisher, for whom "Letters and Social Aims" was to be prepared, had been overtaken by death, and the regret of Emerson for this mischance

may have been lightened by a prospect of release from obligations. This gentleman, however, whose professional aptitude for worrying his clients death itself could not paralyze, had bequeathed his rights to Chatto & Windus, who forthwith appealed to Emerson to carry out his agreement. The distress that followed this appeal was finally relieved by an application to James Elliot Cabot, Emerson's old friend and destined biographer, to arrange the scattered materials into compact essays and to supervise the printing of the book. This work was completed in December, 1875, but it must be remembered that this is the date of the compilation only, not of the material, which is of various unascertained dates and represents no specific phase of Emerson's development.

The close of Emerson's life is marked by the gentle advance of decay, sapping his mental strength, but sparing in great measure both his serenity and his cheerfulness. A trifling circumstance, a mere nothing with that property inherent in certain nothings of fixing themselves ineradicably in the mind, is recorded of his visit in 1866 to the St. Denis Hotel in New York, of his reading of the beautiful poem, "Terminus," to his son, and of that son's first shocked realization that his father had begun to feel the curb of age. The intellectual decline was most obvious in the failure of memory. He had been characterized, in mature life at least, by a deliberate and exquisite nicety in the culling of words for the ends of conversation, suggesting to Dr. Holmes the image of a man crossing a brook on stepping-stones; and the form of aphasia which now supervened seemed an adoption

by nature of this hesitant delicacy. He lost his hold upon common words; Moncure D. Conway reports that he spoke of a chair as that which supports the human frame and of a plough as the implement that cultivates the soil; and adds that at Longfellow's funeral Emerson said, "That gentleman was a sweet, beautiful soul, but I have entirely forgotten his name."

After 1866, he wrote little. The preparation of "Letters and Social Aims" was handed over to Mr. Cabot's tireless fidelity. It is pleasant to be told in the "Journals" that "Parnassus," the anthology of verse issued in 1874, was the outcome of his daughter Edith's sympathy with Emerson's pleasure in poetry and her insistence that he should collect his favorites into a printed volume. The lecturing still went on, even after the once plethoric "Journals" had grown meagre, and the rarity of his letters taxed the patience of his correspondents. The reading of discourses on quiet and friendly occasions did not quite cease until 1880, the year preceding his death. At such times his daughter Ellen invariably sat near him on the platform, to sustain him by her presence, and to lend aid, when occasion bade, in the taming of the rebellious manuscript. Embarrassments sometimes occurred, now and then a source of discomfiture, but quite as often borne with a fortitude which found an admirable second in the patience of his audience. On one occasion he read the same page twice, and his daughter begged him to read the lectures regularly to her in advance. But he gently put aside the request, not doubting the generosity of his tried hearers. Emerson, gracious as he was, loved his own way and his old

way; otherwise, between filial devotion and mechanical ingenuity, the recurrence of such difficulties was surely preventable. A discourteous reception at the University of Virginia in 1876, when Civil-War feeling still smouldered in the South, subjected his constancy to another and sharper form of strain, but his remark to Mr. Cabot on the occurrence was merely that "they are very brave people down there, and say just what they think."

His condition was in many ways happy: his income was assured, his reputation established; Harvard had made him Overseer, and the University of Glasgow had barely saved itself from the indiscretion of choosing him Lord Rector by timely reflection on the higher literary claims of the author of "Vivian Grey." Emerson's children were prosperous: his daughter Edith, now Mrs. William H. Forbes, added the sprightliness of grandchildren to his life; his son Edward, after the completion of his medical studies, had married Miss Keyes, daughter of Hon. John S. Keyes, of Concord, and had settled to his life-work in that town; the eldest daughter remained the support and solace of the home. His own mood was generally cheerful; the haze which obscured his mind was so permeated with light as to seem at times, like certain hazes in nature, barely distinguishable from a glow. He had always loved men in his fashion; in his old age even the scapegrace world seems to have nested shyly in some out-of-the-way crevice of his heart. His solicitude for Mr. Cabot, whose health rather than whose task he gently supervised, is touched with beauty. His conversation at this period is reported to have shown a "uniform and unforced cheer-

fulness." He could still join in his dainty fashion in the fireside merriment, and make sport of his "naughty memory." Dr. Le Baron Russell furnished Dr. Holmes with a pleasantly characteristic anecdote which brings out that delicate histrionism that shimmered playfully here and there on the surface of his sincerity. In the garden, on a June morning, Emerson, standing admiringly before one of his wife's fresh-blown roses, "by a sudden impulse lifted his hat gently, and said with a low bow, 'I take off my hat to it.'"

However, no degree of patience could render the subsidence of faculty otherwise than painful to one to whom its exercise had been so inspiriting. Friendly beholders were touched to pity by the "intensity of his silent attention to every word that was said." A visitor, in 1881, whose record is copied by Alexander Ireland, reports an "indescribable pathos" in Emerson's references to himself. "My health is good enough," he dropped indifferently, and added: "But when one's wits begin to fail, it is time for the heavens to open and take him away."

He had not long to wait for the kindly interposition of the heavens. On Sunday, April 16, 1881, he attended church and took his usual walk: on Thursday the 27th, he was dead. A cold, too slight at first to alarm his family or to hinder his exercise, opened the way for pneumonia to which his enfeebled powers could oppose no vigorous resistance. There was little acute suffering, and no delirium; a dimness, however, overhung his mind, and a mistaken sense that he was ill in a friend's house. In the days when he still went downstairs, he had glanced at the portrait of Carlyle in his study, and had spoken

fondly, "That is my man." Somewhat later, a friend recalls a grave, recollected utterance or stately chant in a voice of almost unimpaired resonance heard in his chamber, during the intervals of slumber, in the night. Among the last gleams that pierced the light mist that veiled his mind in the closing days were a tender farewell to his wife and a last longing reversion to the deep-eyed boy.

The 30th of April was appointed for the obsequies. Between the private service at the house and the brief, closing rites at the grave, the need of public ceremonial, which even the sincerest grief cannot allay in Americans, found expression in a third solemnity at the church, where tributes, including addresses by E. R. Hoar and James Freeman Clarke and a sonnet by Alcott, were read in the presence of the body. All was wisely and tastefully done after its kind, but one likes better to think of the tall pine tree upon the hill-top in Sleepy Hollow, in whose shadow they had scooped his grave, and of the unhewn block of native rose-quartz that guides the steps of friend or pilgrim to the resting-place of those revered ashes.

CHAPTER IV

THE HARVEST

This chapter will be occupied with a review of Emerson's prose works; a succeeding chapter will handle the general characteristics of his prose, and a third will discuss his poetry.

"Nature" is exceptional as a first work in which both the thought and the style of the author are perfectly mature and in which — by an even rarer exception — both are seen at almost their highest level. In the thought of this work, Emerson, always munificent, rises to sheer prodigality; it is, as Dr. Garnett says, "the most intense and quintessential of his writings"; with the exception of the doctrines of "Compensation" and "Self-Reliance," it virtually epitomizes his philosophy. Emerson's growth was that of a helix; first the core, central, vital, and compact, then the inner rings, then outer rings of more bulk and greater diameter as they recede successively from the central heart. "Nature" was the innermost, smallest, and most vital spire in the concentric structure. The review of the doctrine may be left to a future chapter, since it seems preferable to confine ourselves to the peculiarities or differentia of the works as we reach them in order of time and to reserve for subsequent collective discussion their common properties of thought and style.

The plan of "Nature" is not only clear-cut and emphatic; it is one of the most effective plans in this form of literature. It is impressive and picturesque as well as perspicuous: the poetic mind's submission, in this instance, to the restraints of obvious plan, may have arisen from the fact that the plan itself was poetic. The ascent of the ends of Nature from commodity to beauty, from beauty to language, from language to discipline, from discipline to spirit (passing over idealism as not strictly an end or use) is a curiously perfect stratification, comprising, not strata of earth, but rather strata of cloud, rising one upon another in airier and airier substance to their melting-point in the blue empyrean.

"Nature" is the most clear-edged, the most serrate, of all Emerson's essays; but, in the master of paradox, this is no inhibition to its being at the same time conspicuous for flow and pliancy. The same combination of opposites is shown in waves, where the definition of crest and trough is continuous and salient, but where the contrasted effect of fusion and plasticity is equally notable. The work is fluid, because its quality is youthful; indeed, it is the one work of Emerson that conveys strikingly the effect of youth. His earlier experiments in the "Journals" are rather juvenile than young, and, if parts of his later work seem ageless, what has been arrested and perpetuated is not nonage but maturity. But in "Nature," written at thirty-three, the fervor of bodily youth is not yet extinct, and is mixed, in this fortunate period of his life, with the elation of spiritual discovery. Hence the eagerness and swiftness of the work, the note of exaltation which made Holmes rightly say that the

chapters might quite as aptly be called cantos. Hence that quality as of a revived *Te Deum:* "We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. Heaven and earth are full of the majesty of thy glory." Hence the attainment of opulence with concision, more strictly, the attainment of opulence by concision, since when expression is retrenched to the maxim briefly uttered and its enforcing illustrations, six or ten illustrations so grouped suffice to convey an impression of affluence.

That this munificence of beauty should have impressed so lightly a public, accustomed to admire Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, seems at first sight a problem hard to solve. That the thought of "Nature" should not have penetrated the Bostonian organism is explicable enough. It was not the kind of thought that penetrates: it was a thought self-enclosed, self-ensphered, cohering so fully with itself and so little with the everyday aspects of life and reason that it floated aloof in space with the grandeur but also the isolation of a planet. Three things which relate the subsequent Emersonian work to life — the direct counsel, such as "Trust thyself"; the plain concrete fact, such as Bonaparte's cheating at cards; and the homely image, such as the soul's "mumps and measles and whooping-coughs" — are either absent from "Nature" or are found in amounts too small to affect the total impression. These things tend to make the higher Boston public, not intelligent certainly but perfectly intelligible, in its refusal to see in "Nature" anything more significant than a star "languorous with divine excess." We are more surprised by its indifference to the blaze of imagery. Possibly, however, the

very dazzle of that imagery interfered with its instant appreciation; the eye which is quick to notice the pearl in a woman's ear may pass unmoved by a jeweller's window.

The oration on "The American Scholar" was delivered before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge on the 31st of August, 1837. Objection might be made to the title of "The American Scholar" as a double misnomer, since the oration does not deal properly with America, though America is vaguely sighted, in a misty cape or two off the horizon, in the concluding section of the discourse, and it does not deal with scholarship in the usual and normal sense. Emerson's "Scholar" is almost as much a personal appurtenance as Carlyle's "Hero," and, while quarrelling about definitions is easy and useless, it is a little unfortunate to use the new definition on an occasion which gives peculiar emphasis to the old. A man may discourse on "The Catholic Faith," using "catholic" in its radical sense of "universal," to a mixed assemblage without impropriety; but there would be something infelicitous in the application of this meaning to the term before an assembly expressly composed of Romanists. Emerson views the scholar as "Man Thinking," or man converting experience of all kinds into wisdom — functions which pertain to scholars (in the vulgar sense) not as scholars but as a section of humanity. The term particularizes a responsibility which is really universal.

The ordering and marshalling of this oration would have overcome any prejudice less ingrained than that

which charges the hapless Emerson with constitutional want of system. That it divides smoothly into three admirably proportioned sections, with subdivisions, always fitting and sometimes excellent, will merely furnish a resolute public with one more proof of the impertinence of facts.

One notes with interest that, while the matter of the discourse is opposed to university tradition, the style is, for Emerson, academic and clerical, or, more properly, perhaps, the tone is academic and clerical in opposition to both style and matter. The style has its temerities, both homely and florid; but the discourse is low in tone even where it is high in coloring, though now and then a leonine sentence makes its voice resonant through the level and tranquil spaces. For example, "Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom." Or that other far-resounding cry, "If the single man plant himself indomitably on his instincts, and there abide, the huge world will come round to him."

Less than a year later came the Divinity School Address. Of this momentous but tranquil discourse, in which, reversing Mr. Kipling's phrase, the thunder came up like dawn, we may say that, as printed to-day, it is a discourse to be enjoyed by paragraphs. Its totality is not impressive, or, to be exact, it is its totality rather than its integrity (in the strict sense) that impresses us. Even here the arrangement is not logically faulty: the rich keynote in the opening paragraph, the

exposition of the infinitude of morals and the beauty of holiness, the statement of two leading impediments to the reception of this infinitude and beauty, the exhortation to young preachers to resist these impediments and to possess themselves of their inheritance, — this constitutes an order of which Edmund Burke, if not Daniel Webster, would have been quite competent to see the point. The difficulty is psychological, or, in other words, rhetorical, rhetoric being in the last analysis only the concretion of one segment of psychology. The sequence of moods is unlucky. The first half-dozen pages are a kind of "Gloria in excelsis," an august and lofty jubilee; from these we drop with precipitate abruptness into several paragraphs of incisive and destroying criticism, perfect of their kind, better, indeed, than the precedent rhapsodies, but producing, in the wake of these rhapsodies, the effect of the Epistle to the Romans in immediate succession to the concluding chapters of the Apocalypse. After divinities and miracles have been summarily routed, twice the space is accorded to a second much less drastic point of criticism, the soullessness of preaching. Having taken Rome in one week, the reader asks, why spend two in the conquest of Ostia! The recurrence to psalmody and dithyramb in the last part meets, of course, a diminished responsiveness. A better order could readily be devised: first, the magnificent opening as it stands; second, the treatment of preaching, which as fact, as symptom, and as subsidiary point has a claim to priority among the criticisms; third, the assault on persons and on miracles; and lastly, as logical result, rhetorical ascent, and practical incentive, the

dive into the empyrean. The risk of pedantry and seeming captiousness in these specifications is cheerfully incurred for the sake of illustrating a defect of Emerson which is much more serious than the much-lamented and largely mythical want of logical continuity. Emerson's treatment is lofty and striking, but *commodious* it is not; his rhetoric, like his ethics, makes scanty allowance for human infirmity.

We may observe in passing that, while in the storm-centre of his discourse, the passages on Jesus, Emerson's serenity is unperturbed, on the relatively amicable topic of preaching he very nearly loses his temper, a phenomenon so rare that it may possibly account for another equally rare circumstance, his difficulty in persuading himself to leave the subject. Emerson's discourse drew its matter and coloring largely from private experience, and the bitter hours which he had passed under the ministrations of Mr. Frost of Concord — a preacher who seems to have justified his name in the congealing effect he produced upon the most distinguished of his auditors — and other clergymen of the glacial type spoke out in these biting and restive paragraphs. One would like to know how far Emerson's attitude was shared by his contemporaries, how far it was imaged in the young hearts of that senior class from whose irrecoverable sensations in that electric Sunday evening one would so gladly lift a corner of the veil. The question of short commons is a question of appetite as well as food; Emerson's need of intellectual and religious sustenance was great; and possibly in this discourse he resembled some brawny beef-fed Englishman who should

endeavor to incite some abstinent Southern population to revolt against their simple regimen of goat's milk, bread, and olives. It is very probable that Emerson's arraignment — never repeated, we think, with like emphasis in any recorded public utterance — overstated the facts as they would have appeared to a dispassionate and normal observer. It seems proper to assume that a clerical body whose leaders included, or were soon to include, Dr. Channing, Theodore Parker, and James Freeman Clarke, — to say nothing of that Border raider R. W. Emerson, — must have comprised in its minor clergy many men earnest and genuine enough to act as inspirations and stimuli to an ordinary congregation. If they could not inspire Emerson, one is tempted to ask, Should Dives invite himself to dine with Lazarus?

The Address contains many fervid affirmations of the power and splendor of the divine force, but it is noticeable that these canticles do not include the most beautiful passage in the oration. That passage is the stately opening description in which the summer of 1838 is made enviable to all subsequent generations. We listen, not with coldness, but with a certain mildness of response, to the high soprano key in which Emerson proclaims the loftiness of the religious sentiment. "Wonderful is its power to charm and to command. It is a mountain air. It is the embalmer of the world. It is myrrh and storax, and chlorine and rosemary. It makes the sky and the hills sublime, and the silent song of the stars is in it." A passage like this leaves us, as it were, very grateful for very handsome treatment. We are not so bad as Stevenson's unbending widow with her candid,

"I'm sure we all *ought* to be very much obliged to you." We *are* very much obliged. But how different is our response to the penetrating bass note of that organ prelude with which the Address opens: "In this refulgent summer, it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers." It is the rule with Emerson, that, in the passionate outpour of his deepest feelings, where he should theoretically be most impressive, he is less *winning* than in the treatment of matters further from his heart. The reason may well be that these hymns to Deity are the abstract of many diverse hours, and reproduce no defined experience exclusively and sharply.

The passage that made the trouble in this address is in bulk a small affair; it occupies, in the Centenary Edition of the "Works," a little more than five pages in a discourse which itself fills a little less than thirty-three. It is pervaded by that expectation of assent which in Emerson was partly constitutional and instinctive, and partly a fine superadded touch of histrionic deftness. He is not assailing a stronghold, or fighting a battle: he is clearing a path. Emerson handles the topics of the so-called divinity of Christ and of the authenticity of miracles merely because they lie, in a double sense, *in his way;* they are *obvious*, in the fine etymological sense of that word, and they are obstructive. The fine contempt with which he *details*, so to speak, a few paragraphs for the demolition of the fastnesses of Unitarian dogma is in itself sufficiently exhilarating, and nothing can be more admirable than the perfect clear-headed-

ness and mastery — not of logic exactly but of an exposition congruous with logic — with which he unfolds the alternative view. It would be rash to say that Emerson has not his tenebrous moments, that it is always the groping beholder's own density which mistakes the fog on the earth for the cloud in the heavens; it is true, nevertheless, that his intellectual clarity on many occasions might serve as exemplar to thinkers and critics.

On July 24, 1838, nine days after the resonant or repercussive Cambridge Address, Emerson delivered before the literary societies of Dartmouth College an oration called "Literary Ethics." The subject is much larger than the title, deals not so much with literature as with "scholarship" in the spacious Emersonian sense, and is deftly apportioned among three subtopics, the resources, the subject, and the discipline, of the scholar. The first section, though novel doubtless at the time and place, contains little that is markedly significant for the habitual traveller on the Emersonian turnpike. But in the second section, the oration renews itself, with quickened incisiveness, in the glow of demonstrating that literature has left no mark upon the indefeasible originality of landscape, and that the footprint of all human philosophy, even the inclusive or eclectic philosophies, upon the broad tract of truth is equally imperceptible. There follows a landscape passage full of the exuding turpentine which it incidentally mentions, and the landscape which follows on the opposite page has the gusto of the sombrely and austerely real. The demolition of the claim of eclecticism to

finality, the affirmation that the last word on any subject is unspeakable, are carried out with the same force and trenchancy.

The third section of "Literary Ethics" is less continuously lusty and robust, but the beautiful *temper* of Emerson's mind (using the word "temper" in its most intimate and pregnant sense), the poise of that equatorial constitution between the attractions of opposite poles, is clearly shown in the just weight given to the adverse claims of society and solitude and the almost equal insistence on *drill* and *inspiration*. The appeal in the conclusion is august, almost tragic, in its solemnity: "When you shall say, 'As others do, so will I; I renounce, I am sorry for it, my early visions; I must eat the good of the land and let learning and romantic expectations go, until a more convenient season;' — then dies the man in you; then once more perish the buds of art, and poetry, and science, as they have died already in a thousand thousand men." The passing bell of a dead soul has never been tolled more impressively.

The "Method of Nature," an address read on August 11, 1841, before a literary society of Waterville College, Maine, is the receptacle of certain ideas hardly elsewhere to be duplicated in the "Works" or the "Journals" of the self-repeating Emerson. This circumstance heightens the interest of the lecture, but lessens the significance of the ideas. Emerson's mind was both excursive and adhesive, but the emphatic truth on this point — a truth which the "Works" clearly establish and the "Journals" amply confirm — is that the ideas

which he loved he *frequented*. Occurrence without recurrence may be taken as indicative of the failure of a thought to call forth his lasting interest and regard.

The lecture itself, moreover, awakens a momentary impatience even in minds which commonly view an impatience with Emerson as the badge — or brand — of the Philistine. We are told that the method of Nature is circular, and the discourse is as unapproachable, as intractable, and as evasive as a revolving wheel. Indeed, one is sometimes reminded of that astronomic hypothesis which associates strong rotary motion with a great nebula. Nature, we are told, has a succession of ends, a universe of ends; no particular aim can be specified. "Is not man the end?" asks the hesitating reader. "No," says Emerson, in effect, "man is not good enough" — a view that sounds strangely on the lips of a writer who has almost composed a liturgy in praise of the divinity of man. Man must model himself on Nature; he, too, must have a universe of ends seeking nothing in particular, seeking only the expression, by elastic and changing methods, of the divine force which he embodies. If this be true, as seems not improbable, it is nevertheless confusing and disheartening, and we cannot but feel that Nature's wise maternal practice of sanative illusion for her younger children has been brusquely interfered with by some forward older brother's blurting out of the unseasonable truth.

The best things in the "Method of Nature" are the keenly and loftily discriminating second paragraph, and the surprisingly affectionate tribute to the "old religion" with its teaching of "privation, self-denial, and

sorrow." The simile that enforces this truth — perhaps the most rememberable thing in the discourse — illustrates the readiness of Emerson to tap the trees for other than saccharine benefits: "A man was born not for prosperity, but to suffer for the benefit of others, like the noble rock-maple which all around our villages bleeds for the service of man."

"Man the Reformer," delivered before the "Mechanics' Apprentices' Library Association" of Boston, is a much more significant and satisfactory performance. When an idealist approaches social wrongs, one expects three things, ignorance, heat, and extremes. This oration shows information, coolness, and a middle ground. It exhibits a rare sensitiveness to the fact of personal implication in social evils, and a comparative indifference to social wrongs as objective facts independent of such implications. Self-extrication or self-defence is the end in view.

The whole discourse has a superficial resemblance to the work of some cool intellectualist, some disengaged and unconcerned observer, to whom social needs are nothing more than a discipline of the intellect and wit. But the likeness is altogether misleading. Emerson's interest in reform, or rather in renovation, was sincere and far-reaching — too far-reaching to be readily inflamed by specific causes and occasions. His hunger was not greedy precisely because it was insatiable. Of two travellers, one, refusing to stop at the half-way house, pushes on to the large town which is his destination: he may stand for the average radical. The other, for

whom the large town is itself a half-way house, whose destination is on the verge of the continent, stops contentedly at the first good lodging-place; he may stand for Emerson. Both differ sharply from the man who stays at home.

The lecture on the "Times" (December 2, 1841) is not to be ranked among Emerson's successes. It is slow both in getting under way and in coming into port; it is tight-packed, and its movements are unwieldy. One looks in vain for some breathing-hole or embrasure in the firm masonry of its ranged and solid paragraphs. Pictures of two kinds of men, active reformers and students or spectators, are presented. The sketch of the active partisans borrows interest from causticity; "they bite us," says Emerson, "and we run mad." The attempt to visualize the student class is abortive; and the long, imposing passage on spiritual reality evokes deference rather than sympathy.

It is a singular fact that the most entertaining oration in the volume of addresses should have been called forth by that not very promising topic, the "Conservative" (December 9, 1841). The author seems to have worn himself out, or rather to have refreshed and enlivened himself, in the production of varied reliefs and condiments. There is a whimsical fable in which the old Greek gods are felicitously burlesqued; there is, by way of counterpoise, a pleasing and pungent narrative of a mediæval saint; there are pages on pages filled with the liveliest argumentative dialogue, a device of which, so

far as we recall, this oration has the monopoly; and as for similes and metaphors and like relishes, the feast amazes us by its luxury, though we knew at the outset that we dined with Lucullus.

Most writers who credit themselves with a wish to present both sides of a question entrust the defence of the less favored side to imbeciles. In Emerson both partisans are reasonable, respectful, self-possessed, and good-humored, and all this without the slightest detriment to the zest and vigor of the debate. Emerson's attitude is that of the father who watches a wrestling-match between his boys, and to whom a lusty stroke on either side is ground for complacency. At the end he is ranged with the liberals, but he protracts the journey toward the ultimata.

"The Transcendentalist" was delivered in January, 1842, at the Masonic Temple, Boston. The admirable (though not invariable) perspicuity of Emerson's mind which often made him the most luminous of expositors, is exhibited in the strong, assured, yet dynamic and progressive, explanation of the difference between idealism and materialism. What calmness! what mastery! what easy, natural control and pilotage of the materials! Most of the professional clarifiers and strainers seem muddy beside this soothsayer of whom the best they could say was: "He is a dreamer; let us leave him. — Pass."

All goes well for a few pages, but Emerson is speedily overtaken by a luckless impulse to sketch the Transcendentalists in the concrete, and the concreteness is of a sort to make its victims sigh for the shelter of a merci-

ful abstraction. The thing is done in a friendly spirit, as the reader has to remind himself with increasing emphasis at the end of every deadly paragraph. It is almost inconceivable that Emerson should have made a present to enemies and satirists of this picture of mawkish, querulous, self-conscious youth in whom the German romanticist seems to have been grafted on the moon-struck Elizabethan. Our sense of humor — a profane faculty, indeed, but one for whose education the gentle Emerson is partly responsible — finds nutriment in these idlers and solitaries whose inclusion in a serious discourse seems a robbery of comic opera.

The last lecture in the first volume of the "Works," called the "Young American," is of later date than the others — February 7, 1844. It contains many pleasing remarks on those national and practical themes on which felicity is habitual with Emerson, but its total effect is a little perplexing and irritating, because, in place of the plan which it affects to emphasize, the reader sees little but an aggregate of scattered reflections on American life. Return to the land is approved; trade, which always had a spell for Emerson, is eulogized; and communism, or communitarianism, is praised with reservations. One cannot forbear quoting the serenely dare-devil remark: "As if the Union had any other real basis than the good pleasure of a majority of the citizens to be united."

In March, 1841, appeared the first series of Emerson's "Essays," published in Boston by James Munroe and

Company. An English edition, of which Fraser undertook the expense and Carlyle furnished the preface, shortly followed.

The twelve essays in this epoch-making volume, over which the world, with its characteristic mixture of business and laziness, refused to excite itself, are divisible into two groups — a division extensible to nearly all the essay work in later volumes. Dr. Emerson has rightly suggested that the place for "The Over-Soul" is directly after "Self-Reliance." This agrees well with the fairly evident truth that five of the "Essays" — "History," "Self-Reliance," "Compensation," "Spiritual Laws," and "The Over-Soul" — constitute a defined group of which both the substance and the method are peculiar; they take up the articles in the Emersonian "Credo," and each is built on the simple plan of illustrating one (in "Spiritual Laws" possibly two or three) basic principle with an abundance and variety of brief, rapid examples hardly to be paralleled in literature. There follows the same combined effect of simplicity and bewilderment which is produced by the movement in a single direction of a vast and parti-colored assemblage.

The other essays in this and subsequent volumes are moulded on another plan. They select some topic — love, prudence, experience, gifts — which is related to the main Emersonian truth after the fashion of a transverse rib or cross-bar, and their method is to trace this rib or bar to its point of intersection with the grand trunk; they divide into several lobes or sections, each of which comprises its own relatively small group of illustrative materials. In reviewing the essays in the

"First Series," we shall, as before with the orations, confine ourselves for the moment to mere differentiæ; universalities, whether of thought or style, will be adjourned to a future chapter.

In the mere *yield* of illustration by a single idea, the essay on "History" is perhaps the most remarkable *tour de force* extant in Emerson or in anybody else. The main thought is that every phase in the external or objective record of men and things (including not only history in the official sense, but literature, mythology, art, and, at a pinch, the data of science itself) is duplicated and hence foretold in the spirit of the individual. The singleness of the idea is, indeed, somewhat modified by the inclusion of examples of unity in variety among the several parts of the objective record itself; but, even with this allowance, the concentration, the centripetence, of the imagery remains astonishing. There is no break or slackening in the illustrations, and their felicity is commensurate with their abundance. We are reminded of Wordsworth's

> "flowers that with one scarlet gleam
> Cover a hundred leagues, and seem
> To set the hills on fire."

The essay, indeed, furnishes as unmixed and delicate a pleasure as anything in Emerson. Its refinement and tranquillity are pervasive; its meaning can usually be had on "easy terms"; it presses no stern claims; it is all a proffer of homage and a bestowal of privilege. Its geniality is perhaps more keenly felt by virtue of the contrast with its relatively bumptious and contentious neighbor "Self-Reliance."

"Self-Reliance" is the most spinous and bristling of the essays of Emerson, as it is unquestionably one of the greatest. With the exception of two or three sentences in "Spiritual Laws," it is almost the only essay in which our own tolerant generation perceives that "nipping and eager air" which bit so shrewdly into the more sensitive cuticle of his contemporaries. It contains the memorable "Devil's child" reply, magnificent at least as rhetoric; the rasping "Are they my poor?" the scoffing "alms to sots"; and the suggestion that even the domestic affections may be snares and impediments. Yet even in this, the most trenchant of the essays, the eye is faced at every other turning by some devout, idyllic, or inspiring passage. One has a certain feeling, moreover, that Emerson is not quite himself in these very paragraphs in which the horror of not being one's self is so drastically presented; there is a little self-coercion in this stinging defence of spontaneity. Not that this is felt everywhere or even frequently. Emerson is himself when he tells us that our rejected thoughts "come back to us with a certain alienated majesty." He is himself again when he exhorts: "Speak what you think now in hard words and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day." But in the well-known passage beginning with "Are they my poor?" and closing with the "wicked dollar," one feels that here is wrath which a little nursing has helped to keep warm, that here is language which the fear of inadequacy has exacerbated.

The vigor which marks Emerson and the tension

which sometimes makes that vigor a little disquieting are both exhibited at their maximum in "Self-Reliance." These few pages contain most of the destructive criticisms which have given edge to the essayist's fame, — the attacks on conformity, on consistency, on "philanthropy," on travelling, on imitation, on social progressiveness, — a curiously mild-looking list of evils and scourges if one stops to meditate. Some of these have scarcely recovered their standing, though it is to be feared they have retained their influence, since the Emersonian onslaught; since his date their very bullying is hangdog. No essay of Emerson contains so many phrases that are at the same time barbed and winged.

"Self-Reliance" is structurally ineffective; after the first inclusive paragraph, the reader is in the distressed condition of those children who have received all their presents in the first ten minutes of the long Christmas day. It is unfortunate, also, in rising to a specular mount in the middle of its course and in baffling the expectations of finality thus produced by a sudden redescent into the asperities of the plain and market-place. No essay shows us more traits or sides of Emerson, but the features somehow intercept the face. It is likewise true that, while the treatment is a compendium of the Emersonian moods and style, it is subject as a whole to a criticism which does not apply to its separate paragraphs or to its companion essays, "History," "Compensation," or "Spiritual Laws"; it lacks tone. There is a singularly mixed effect of anthem, eclogue, sermon, and denunciation.

"Compensation" is, of all the essays of Emerson, the

most harassing — not to say the most harrowing — to the analyst. We may remark first of all that there is a fusion — or confusion — between the two doctrines that every sweet has its sour and that every sin has its punishment, — an unhappy conjunction, since, if pleasure as such is penal, the provision which makes guilt penal likewise loses half its dignity and effectiveness. Furthermore, there is an oscillation between the principle of debt, which rests on equivalence, and the principle of the tax, which implies merely abatement. Nevertheless, the work has real virtues; the mere muster of illustrations is imposing, and by simple mass, by sheer tonnage, so to speak, almost conquers the imagination; and the essay, by a diverting paradox, makes use of exaggeration and overstatement to bring out the great moderative principle in things which sets bounds to the intensity and the duration of happiness and suffering alike. "Compensation," moreover, is a brisk, nimble, companionable essay, attractive even to those with whom "The Over-Soul" is responsible for headaches. The relish of Emerson for these cumulative particulars is unmistakable. He watches with inward gusto the good, housewifely universe making her shrewd bargains with her greedy customers, and with fatal certainty getting the best of it, or (as he would say) the right of it, in her chafferings with the butcher, milkman, and tin-peddler. The phrase, "the stern ethics that sparkles on his chisel-edge," is happily expressive of the essay's tenor.

"Spiritual Laws" ranks first in nobility, perhaps, among the essays of its author. Its opening has that

tempered magnificence which he sometimes, in an indulgent mood, allows us to have by way of change from the relatively cheap diet of unstinted affluence which, at his table, is our daily fare. (At that board it is a luxury to fast.) "When the act of reflection takes place in the mind, when we look at ourselves in the light of thought, we discover that our life is embosomed in beauty. Behind us, as we go, all things assume pleasing forms, as clouds do far off. Not only things familiar and stale, but even the tragic and terrible, are comely as they take their place in the pictures of memory. The river-bank, the weed at the water-side, the old house, the foolish person, however neglected in the passing, have a grace in the past. Even the corpse that has lain in the chambers has added a solemn ornament to the house."

This tranquil and majestic style, this manner that clothes the thought as in a stole or pallium, is sustained on the whole throughout the essay. It is true that even in "Spiritual Laws" he permits himself moments of frowardness. There is the unfortunate Mr. Crump, so unjustly handicapped in his pursuit of the ideal by his cockney name, whom we are not permitted to admire for "his grunting resistance to all his native devils." There is that disrespectful reference to original sin, origin of evil, and predestination as the soul's mumps and measles and whooping-coughs, and the unsympathetic inquiry as to the motive for dragging the dead weight of a Sunday-School over all Christendom! In spite of these occasional crackles and sparkles by which Emerson wisely warns us against any too sanguine

presumptions of good behavior, the essay produces a temple-like impression of space, purity, and tranquillity which it would be difficult to parallel in the other writings. In "Spiritual Laws" the authority, the sovereignty, of the prevailing tone over particular forms of imagery is better sustained than in the usual essay. Even the plan has its points of superiority; in "History" and in "Compensation" we have only a grand trunk and innumerable twigs: in "Spiritual Laws" the presence of several main thoughts supplies the ornament of branches.

Nobody could subscribe to the thoughts *in toto*, but there is nothing in them to overtax the practised reader's dexterity in stripping off the exaggerations which conceal their wisdom. One would hardly set down yielding or passiveness in the accepted sense as the initial text in the gospel of efficiency, and one's reverence for inconsistency must have prospered mightily before the doctrine that all things pass for exactly what they are worth can be literally accepted on the heels of the other doctrine that all values are subjective, that each man sees only the value which he embodies. There is wisdom, nevertheless, in all these ideas for those who do not apply them too rashly, and the wisdom is spacious and sunny.

The essay on "Love" is one of the most curious documents in the Emerson collection. The love here treated is primarily erotic, and one might have vaguely expected a placid disdain, a delicate aloofness, or indulgent patronage in the handling of such a theme by such a man. To our surprise his treatment of the subject

is Venetian; he writes in dithyrambs; he manifests an abandonment usually reserved for the Over-Soul and its associated topics. That this passion should have vibrated strongly in the retentive memory of Emerson is explicable enough; his was a soul avid of influxes, solicitous of immersions; he wanted to be swept away, and, except in his religious exaltations which came too rarely, the privilege was all but inaccessible. The sole occasion — up to the date of these essays at least — in which he had been swept off his feet by a non-religious motive, stood out naturally with monumental distinctness.

There are, however, several singularities in the expression of this youthful ecstasy. Emerson apologizes for this self-indulgence (here as often the apology is the offence) by assuring us that these early raptures are merely prelusive and preparatory to the spiritual beatifications that are to follow. Now when our saint, in some genial hour, has been persuaded, beyond expectation, to enter into our tent and break bread with us, it is disconcerting to hear him say, as he rises from the table, that the act was merely sacramental. We had hoped, God forgive us, that he was a little hungry. Again, it is interesting to note that when Emerson talks from observation he is more attractive than when he speaks from experience. In his picture of the love of all mankind for a lover, of the school-girls and the "broad-faced, good-natured shop-boy," he is altogether charming; he is only half charming in his record of the behavior of this peculiar person whose head "boils" all night on his pillow, and who walks, in the daytime, with arms akimbo, soliloquizing and accosting the grass and

the trees. It is true that the very passage from which these whimsicalities are extracted contains exquisite things; in fact, it reminds us alternately of the impressiveness of distance-mellowed wedding bells and of the rich incrustations of a bridecake. Emerson, in this passage which is clearly meant to be glowing, has not so much reproduced the glow as a whole as he has demonstrated its preëxistence and tipped some of his phrases with its revived fire.

Another interesting circumstance must not pass unremarked. The world has shrunk to the man and his passion, or rather these have dilated until they have become conterminous with the universe, and the rest of the world is necessarily shut out. Among the things shut out is the woman. The pronouns "she" and "her" do not occur in the three pages devoted to the portrayal of rapture; the young wooer digests his happiness in the forest. Emerson, to do him justice, is not without a well-bred sense of the ungraciousness of excluding a woman from her own love-affair; he even comments on the strangeness of the fact that this subordination should be necessary.

On the whole, the essay on "Love" is too full of alternating exhilarations and disappointments to rank among *satisfying* products; but as a unique document in the Emerson *dossier* its significance is undeniable. One bitter and moving wail — a wail the more affecting that it forces itself into the midst of the psalmody — must be quoted for its disclosure of character: "Alas! I know not why, but infinite compunctions embitter in mature life the remembrance of budding joy, and cover

every beloved name." As contrast and counterpoise to this, one may set the last paragraph but one, which records gravely and nobly the beneficence of marriage in replacing delicate and perishable enchantments by assured and uplifting realities.

The essay on "Friendship" is the most discomforting and estranging performance in the entire volume. If he had stopped with his heartening motto, if he had even stopped with the two first warm-blooded lines, —

> "A ruddy drop of manly blood
> The surging sea outweighs," —

he would have left us stimulated and inspired. But this is only the parting handshake on the wharf; the next moment he has weighed anchor, and is steering lustily into the polar sea of this immitigable essay. The difficulty for the reader does not lie exclusively or mainly in the superior loftiness of Emerson's friendships. Open and cultivated minds interest themselves readily enough in warm and concrete pictures of feelings which they do not vividly share. Men whose taste for painting or music is slight read Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" or "Abt Vogler" with emotion. But these men could not interest others in music or painting, and Emerson's fault in this essay is not that he portrayed relations which he possessed and others lacked, but that he portrayed a friendship to which he only distantly aspired. Emerson's portrayal of religious feeling in "The Over-Soul" is warm and intimate; it can, therefore, interest people who are not temperamentally religious. But his data in "Friendship" are hypothetic and imaginary even to himself, and the reader who might have crossed the rift

between himself and the live Emerson cannot possibly span the further chasm which separates the live Emerson from his vision or phantasm of himself.

The relation here extolled is not the friendship that Emerson expressed and felt for W. H. Furness, for John Sterling, and for Thomas Carlyle; it is not the friendship commemorated in the prefatory versicle. Emerson is, as often, beforehand with us in the notation of his defect when he says of friendship: "I wish it to be a little of a citizen before it is quite a cherub." But he is so afraid lest friendship should compromise independence and intercourse should compromise friendship that the relation seems finally to resolve itself (in the essay) into a few retired, almost solitary enjoyments and a host of discrediting and disheartening precautions. Two friends need not eat together unless they choose; but, having sat down at the board together, they cannot without absurdity refuse to eat. Two mutual admirers need not become friends; but, having entered upon that relation, they cannot without fatuity eschew intercourse.

The workmanship of the essay is less attractive than usual. Emerson's gift of epigram is faithful in the worst extremities; but it forsakes him, much to its credit, when he summons it to defend this bloodless and speechless phantasm of friendship. Still, he could not write twenty-five pages without being tripped up by felicities. The following sentence illustrates a power — shown oftener perhaps in his prose than his verse — of putting a complete natural picture into a few perfectly chosen words: "Ought I to feel that our tie is profane in com-

parison with yonder bar of cloud that sleeps on the horizon, or that clump of waving grass that divides the brook?"

The mere title "Prudence," in a volume of this kind, is a certificate of sanity; nay, it certifies to more than this; it contents and comforts us like the sight of a man stopping on his way to greet his king to exchange a friendly word with an old nurse or gardener. A passage like this in the works of a philosopher is singularly winning: "The good husband finds method as efficient in the packing of fire-wood in a shed or in the harvesting of fruits in the cellar, as in Peninsular campaigns or the files of the Department of State. In the rainy day he builds a workbench, or gets his tool-box set in the corner of the barn-chamber, and stored with nails, gimlet, pincers, screwdriver, and chisel. Herein he tastes an old joy of youth and childhood, the cat-like love of garrets, presses, and corn-chambers, and of the conveniences of long housekeeping. His garden or his poultry-yard tells him many pleasant anecdotes. One might find argument for optimism in the abundant flow of this saccharine element of pleasure in every suburb and extremity of the good world." One feels that a man who can insert a passage of this kind between "Spiritual Laws" and "The Over-Soul" is somehow incorrigibly lovable; one forgives him even the essay on "Friendship."

Emerson, who was, as Lowell said, equally at home with pegging shoes and "The Over-Soul," liked the plain and homely facts of life both for their symbolic and their disciplinary value. He loved to read the great laws

in this rude dialect, and in the commerce between the schoolboy, man, and the pedagogue, Nature, he watched with almost equal relish the lad's craft in outwitting the schoolmaster and the sharp raps on the knuckles with which the latter chid his pupil's negligence.

"Heroism" follows "Prudence" as corrective and antitype, and as prudence is resolvable into thrift and care, so heroism, by way of contrast, takes on the aspect of glorious wastefulness or splendid nonchalance.

The essay is discursive and sauntering, and its topics have a fortuitous or irrelevant quality like the trifling remarks exchanged by assembling soldiers between bugle-calls. As prudence had been converted into truth, courage, and love, so heroism is oddly, almost quaintly, identified with virtues so seemingly alien as temperance and even hospitality. These are not the things that actually count. What counts is the tingling and mettlesome quality, the gay *insouciance*, the fine headiness and sparkle of the new-broached virtue, the spirit of the boy who, first on the ice or first in the swimming-pool, calls lustily and mockingly to his tardy companions.

This heroism is not of the orthodox brand; indeed, a good-natured contempt for the orthodox brand as being hardly better than the cupidities it restrains is possibly the distinctive note. Not that the essay lacks its austere moments. It contains that priceless sentence: "It is but the other day that the brave Lovejoy gave his breast to the bullets of a mob, for the rights of free speech and opinion, and died when it was better not to live," — an utterance which, according to George P. Bradford, caused some of his friends and sympathizers

to feel the "cold shudder which ran through the audience at the calm braving of the current opinion."

"The Over-Soul" is the single essay of Emerson which one may safely call eloquent: it shares the claim to that praise with two or three of the orations. No less than twelve times its subject is compared to water, and the discourse would seem to have borrowed a peculiar plasticity from that mobile and fluid element. Its plan, though not incoherent, is neither very strict nor very manifest, but its gliding movement imparts an unusual effect of continuity and solidarity. There are few essays which tend to globe themselves so completely, few in which the whole holds its own so successfully against the competition of the parts.

The ground of this quality is not hard to discover. Emerson's exhilarations, though numerous, were as a rule insulated and momentary; on this subject he commanded for once a continuity of mood. He speaks better here than anywhere else of the divine principle. He is not commonly at his best in his celebration of the all-embosoming beauty. For instance, when in "Self-Reliance" he tells us that "the immortal light, all young and joyful, million-orbed, million-colored, will beam over the universe as on the first morning," we are teased by a slight sense of excess: we feel that a thousand orbs, and — such is our abject state — a dozen colors would have satisfied the frugal demands of our pedestrian imagination. But in "The Over-Soul" there is no trying, no overshooting of the mark; its highly intellectualized character, which, in a discourse steeped in rhapsody, hardly permits the intrusion of a purely exclamatory

sentence, may be noted as one defence; the gentle and even fulness of the sentiment is another.

A peculiar calm, indeed, is the mark of this essay; its very undulations are of the kind that cradle and reassure. There is a curious fondness for the verb "lie" in a vivid metaphorical sense. "The great nature in which we rest as the earth lies in the soft arms of the atmosphere"; "the background of our being, in which they lie"; "we lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature." There are the marks of the severer Emerson, the baffling paradoxes such as the abrogation of time, the audacious radicalisms, the austere inhibitions; but all are subdued to a rare gentleness. "You are preparing with eagerness to go and render a service to which your talent and your taste invite you, the love of men and the hope of fame. Has it not occurred to you that you have no right to go unless you are equally willing to be prevented from going?" No man could be more winningly gentle than Emerson in the enunciation of so implacable, so crushing, a demand. One is not sure that "The Over-Soul" has not found, in another sentence, the tenderest expression for the divine benevolence since the Biblical "God is love," and that, too, by another marvel, in connection with that arctic word, being. "His [man's] welfare is dear to the heart of being." The universe, under the spell of those fondly lingering syllables, becomes almost more than a home; it becomes a *nest*.

"The Over-Soul," to be fairly judged, must be received for what it is — a rich, poetic transfusion of a uniquely high and rare experience. An adequate forti-

fication for a creed, or even, by ordinary standards, a convenient dwelling-house for a faith, it fails to provide.

"Circles" is single among the Emersonian essays — single in its daring. Brief passages in other essays dare as much, but nowhere else is the animating principle of a discourse so venturous. We half believe, in reading these hardy paragraphs, that yesterday the universe was moored, and that this reckless adventurer has slipped down under shelter of the night, and cut its cable. The "flux" has been much dwelt upon, but one doubts if the realization of the plasticity of the universe (in distinction from the mere slipperiness of the personal life) has ever elsewhere reached the point attained in "Circles." There is something strange, half-Hebraic and half-pagan, in the sternly exultant mood in which Emerson watches the emergence of the consuming force: "Beware when the Great God lets loose a thinker upon this planet. Then all things are at risk. It is as when a conflagration has broken out in a great city, and no man knows what is safe, or where it will end." Even the virtues, as we know and conceive them, are not fireproof.

There is no evidence that this transitoriness of the virtues was to Emerson much more than an exciting possibility, fine hazard or stirring peril, adding the charm of romantic vicissitude to the unguessed destinies of mankind. For "Circles," with all its intrepidity, is not a revolutionary manifesto, nor even a "Marseillaise"; it is an attempt to gauge the depth of the universe by the rapidity with which it engulfs institutions and beliefs. Emerson was content with his view of the depths:

his generalizations are devastating, but his illustrations are relatively mild. The truth is that the sense that change is continuous quiets the eagerness for those particular changes whose value rests largely on our trust in their finality. Radicalism is half destroyed by the universalizing of its own principle.

After that hymn that the morning stars sang together, "The Over-Soul," and that bold sortie into the undiscovered country called "Circles," the essay on "Intellect" can be read with undisturbed serenity. It is true that if any one chooses to excite himself over self-contradictions, there are provocations enough to make him purple in the face, but, to the wiser traveller who takes these things in the Emersonian country as he would cacti in Texas, the way is attractive, if not markedly exciting. The essay shows a common sense which in Emerson is almost more notable than genius, since genius is too continuous to be distinctive. Having dined for a month by the light of the aurora borealis, one is half excited by an incidental return to the disused candle or electric jet. Emerson tells us good, shrewd, quiet things which we like none the worse for our power to verify them from the stores of our homely experience, and which please us more perhaps when transferred to our private shelves than when ranged by some occult plan in the quaint cabinets of his museum.

The essay has more of academic gravity and sobriety than is commonly found in the volume; only once does the sleeping gnome in Emerson wake up and send his wilful elfish outcry echoing through the solemn paragraphs. Æschylus is still on trial after educating "the

learned of Europe for a thousand years. He is now to approve himself a master of delight to me also. If he cannot do that, all his fame shall avail him nothing with me. I were a fool not to sacrifice a thousand Æschyluses to my intellectual integrity." With which singular mixture of deep sagacity and frolic impertinence one finds it easy to sympathize.

In contrast with "Intellect," which discloses a certain density, even tightness, of workmanship, the essay on "Art," small though it be, impresses us with its space and perspective; it has a miniature stateliness, it is a peristyle in abridgment. Its principles, which are large and many, emerge each beyond the other with a movement as rapid as it is unhurried. The utterance is relatively free; the stricture in the throat which sometimes impedes Emerson is taken off, and the voice pours out in rounded and untrammelled periods. The thoughts are the thoughts of a profound mind restricted in certain ways, but no less clearly liberated and furthered in others by its ignorance of technique; the only sound critic of these principles would be one who brought a greater technical intelligence to the support of an equal profundity. Emerson views art in relation to the great stream of racial life, and studies it at the point where it branches from that stream in its first conception in the artist's mind and at the point where it rejoins the main current in the changes it works in the beholder's spirit. It is doubtful whether artists could read the essay on "Art" without some internal constrictions, just as it is doubtful whether heroes could read the essay on "Heroism" without biting their lips. It is certain, however,

that Emerson, on subjects a little removed from his own specialty, had the art of saying noble things — noble whether true or false — which were in the highest degree grateful and satisfying to idealists of all classes, even the class which recoiled from his cardinal tenets. The corollaries of his doctrines endeared him to people who shrank from his fundamental propositions. Hence the peculiarly sympathetic treatment of topics like books, gifts, manners, and domestic life. Of this distinguished felicity the first essay on "Art" is the earliest and perhaps the most eminent example.

So closes this remarkable volume — the most remarkable possibly that America has produced. Emerson's philosophy is compressed into these few pages — indeed, it is all to be distilled from "Self-Reliance," "Compensation," and "The Over-Soul." Succeeding works merely amplify and specify, and in no later work or in all together are the principles so completely, so compactly, and so forcibly presented. Even in this volume, in spite of abundance and compression, repetition is perceptible: certain leading thoughts reappear with the sureness with which a great hill or a great river reëmerges to the eyes of those who walk or drive in its proximity. The essays dispensed a philosophy parcel-wise and a temperament piecemeal; they exhibited a personality strongly marked and somewhat variegated, which seemed at times, however, to be nothing more than the band or girdle around a centre of elusive impersonality. Both the thought and the style were novel, electrifying, disconcerting; yet they dealt with subjects and ends which deprived them of the

popular advantages of their qualities. That they should be at first to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness was an issue almost too obvious to be deplored: the future hoarded its secure compensations.

The second series of "Essays" (1844) has the misfortune to be the second; furthermore, it scarcely contains an essay of value commensurate with any one of the five great essays in the initial series; and the disposition — the posting in the military sense — of its materials hardly favored the instant recognition of their value. The first essay, "The Poet," is excellent in its well-bred way, but its orthodoxy — that is, its Emersonian orthodoxy — is decided; it is hardly a good fifer to march at the head of the troop. "Experience," which follows, is really a trenchant essay, but its trenchancy is so far disguised that, in the highly respectable company of "The Poet" and "Character," another well-mannered effort, it passes almost unchallenged. "Manners" is a dapper, lithe, penetrative piece of work, but too slender, too sprayey, to affect the tone of a volume. The noble treatment of "Nature" with its symphonic overture is perhaps the first essay that stands out with independent significance. "Gifts" is gem-like but minute: a cabinet hardly counts as a room. "Politics" has an agreeable but retiring massiveness, and "Nominalist and Realist" and the "New England Reformers" are not sufficiently towering to overcome the drawback of their position in the rear. For all these reasons, the whole volume hardly equals the sum of its parts.

The essays in this volume scarcely call for minute,

individual criticism; we shall particularize only on the two somewhat abnormal discussions entitled "Experience" and "Nominalist and Realist."

"The Poet" and "Character" are reputable and mannerly essays; they are repetitions of high mass, so to speak, with due pomp, in the Emersonian chapel. "Experience," on the contrary, seems one of the boldest essays in literature, though its boldness has an almost casual air, as if a man should blow up a minster by way of correction to the monotony of an evening walk. It is a provoking, unsettling, aggressive, half-Mephistophelean essay; it acts as pry or wedge; it loosens, dislodges, and upheaves. It shows Emerson's faculty for turning his own flank and assailing himself, as it were, in the rear; the essay might have been written by a critic of Emerson, more alert, more skeptical, and less devout.

The very form of the composition is suggestive. It is packed with matter, but it is not air-tight; there are spaces which favor respiration. It has an undeniable plan, a plan of which you may list or count the segments, a plan which the rhetorician may admit, though it leave the mere reasoner a little dubious and inquisitive. The movement again has a free swing, a nonchalant eagerness, a careless and virile stride, that differs curiously from the grave ceremonial pace of the precedent and following essays. The sentences are short and impatient; the diction has a premeditated homeliness and brusqueness. He quotes the homely proverb, "In for a mill, in for a million"; he makes a supposed speaker say, "Come out of that"; he hears "the chuckle of the

phrenologists"; when he shall adapt his conversation to the shape of heads, the doctors may buy him for a cent.

The teaching is equally pungent. "So much of our time is preparation, so much is routine, and so much retrospect, that the pith of each man's genius contracts itself to a very few hours." Grief is "scene-painting and counterfeit." "What cheer can the religious sentiment yield, when that is suspected to be secretly dependent on the seasons of the year and the state of the blood?" "I cannot recall any form of man who is not superfluous sometimes." "To fill the hour — that is happiness; to fill the hour and leave no crevice for a repentance or an approval." "Nature, as we know her, is no saint. . . . She comes eating and drinking and sinning. Her darlings . . . do not come out of the Sunday-School, nor weigh their food, nor punctually keep the commandments." "The individual is always mistaken." "We permit all things to ourselves, and that which we call sin in others is experiment for us." These are strong doctrines, and when, in the course of his exposition, we find Emerson referring to "the dear old spiritual world and even the dear old devil," we are half ready to concede that the establishment of affectionate relations with that potentate is only a matter of common prudence.

One or two of these points are strongly modified; one or two are liberally interpreted; for all, compensations are found. But the essay remains a most striking and memorable document; the evasive, temporizing, prevaricative aspects of Nature are grasped with a clear-

ness which would do honor to an agnostic. Equally remarkable is the abandonment by the convinced idealists of the ordinary supports and resources of idealism, after the fashion of the young David rejecting the sword and the helmet and conquering the giant with the sling and the stones from the brook. The victory is gained in the end; idealism is reëstablished, but the world in which its authority is renewed looks to the common eye like a dismantled, almost a dispeopled, universe. Nothing is left at last but the subject — the Ego — and the world-spirit — the One: and their union is the sole value in life. It is curious that in one part of his essay Emerson turns his destroying analysis upon analysis itself; the chemist melts up his melting-pot.

"Nominalist and Realist," with its generalized theme and its unpromising title, is a cast from the same mould as "Experience." It is a highly intellectualized performance, one of the wiriest, one of the most restless, prehensile, and muscular among the essays in this and kindred volumes. Jacob wrestles all night with the angel, or rather perhaps with some entity half-demonic, some imp of the perverse, and the joy of the encounter is evident in the elastic spring and tension of the crisp and rapid sentences. Emerson delights to seize the fugitive truth in the pincers offered by a pair of contradictions: he sympathizes with the wilfulness and recalcitrancy of Nature as one takes pleasure in the naughtiness of a spirited child. The essay is ably if somewhat bafflingly written, and is notable for its own type of epigram, not the mere felicity that dazzles or electrifies like "All mankind loves a lover" and "Hitch your wagon to a star";

but the saying that arrests the truthseeker by its power of checking itself at the very point where the common epigram plunges recklessly ahead. "Every man is wanted, and no man is wanted much." "I am always insincere, as always knowing there are other moods." "Is it that every man believes every other to be an incurable partialist, and himself a universalist?" Then he frees his mind in a passage that in its acid sweetness amusingly and yet instructively illustrates the difficulty Emerson had in thinking *with* his fellow-men even when he thought *as* they did: "I talked yesterday with a pair of philosophers: I endeavored to show my good men that I liked everything by turns and nothing long; that I loved the centre, but doated on the superficies; that I loved man, if men seemed to me mice and rats; that I revered saints, but woke up glad that the old pagan world stood its ground and died hard; that I was glad of men of every gift and nobility, but would not live in their arms."

"Representative Men," published January 1, 1850, was the expansion of a course of lectures delivered before the Manchester Athenæum in England. The volume comprises seven lectures, one prefatory and general on the "Uses of Great Men"; the other six dealing with Plato (the philosopher), Swedenborg (the mystic), Montaigne (the sceptic), Shakespeare (the poet), Napoleon (the man of the world), and Goethe (the writer). Even this briefest of summaries suggests two or three interesting facts: that the "representative men," a phrase of which, in this special application, Emerson is said to be the originator, represent rather tendencies

than multitudes; that the concreteness is — for Emerson — marked; that the variety, ranging from Plato to Bonaparte, is considerable. A shrewd observer, conversant with Emerson, might divine possibly the method from the titles: he might conclude that each man would be promptly identified with some attitude or aspect of human nature; that he would fall heir forthwith to the glories and the responsibilities of that function; that his inheritance of these glories would insure him many paragraphs of rapturous encomium; and that his inadequacy to those responsibilities would expose him finally to sharp deductions, almost to reproaches. The observer might note again with interest that while careful distinction is made between two such cognate functions as those of poet and writer, the saint and the prophet are either entirely left out, or are huddled loosely together under the insufficient label of mystic. His surprise at finding the man of the world admitted to this Olympian conclave will be removed by the later discovery that man of the world means nothing more than the efficient man, the man of action.

The first lecture in the volume, "Uses of Great Men," proves that really vigorous parts may produce a somewhat languid whole. The work lacks, not momentum precisely, but impulsiveness; it is level, level on a high altitude, even, dignified, intellectual, possibly a little massive. The marshalling of the topics is not unskilful for a man who, in this field, ranks only with the captains of militia, but the want of superficial continuity, of facile and lucid transitions, is felt with exceptional keenness in some parts of this discourse. In the keen-

ness of its use of facts, it shows unusual affinities with everyday life.

The discontent of Carlyle with the lecture on Plato has been echoed by later commentators, but to our mind it remains secure of its lofty place among Emerson's notable and masterly expositions. The breadth, the reach, of the impressions it makes is by no means its least memorable trait; Emerson's manner is ordinarily too crenelated with rhetorical cusps and spires, too much broken up into jutty, frieze, buttress, and coign of vantage to lend itself to those effects of simple amplitude which Ruskin praised so cordially in architecture. In the "Plato," however, the magnitudes are discernible, and the restfulness which is the accompaniment of space is felt everywhere in the majestic treatise. The whole lecture is composed with a gusto that seems a little short of incredible in view of the temporal remoteness and the philosophic abstractness of its theme. The chord that dominates in this work as in the lecture on Shakespeare is the chord of exultation. The praise of Emerson is tidal; its sympathy is prodigal, its rejoicing is boundless; it is content, for the moment at least, to plunder the universe if by so doing it can enrich its idol with a new trophy. Yet, even in this luxury of self-surrender, Emerson, in whom the reappearance of criticism was inevitable, keeps his head, and surprises us anew in the concluding paragraphs by unsuspected reservations.

Emerson's warmth is the more notable that its object as drawn in his pages is quite bloodless: he sees only the intellectual lineaments of Plato; he is enamored of a

profile. That profile, indeed, had a right to his homage, because it was the first illustrious example of that synthesis which holds in equipoise the One and the Many — a synthesis of which the last great exemplar lived in Concord and trod the banks of the Musketaquid. Emerson no less than Plato — or, shall we say the Emersonian Plato, for people tell us that such a character exists by way of supplement to the Platonic Socrates — felt the equal attraction, the equal necessity, of a continual passage from the circumference to the centre and a no less persistent re-passage from the centre to the circumferfence. Both needed worship, needed play: they found their play in the chase of the divine unity from disguise to disguise, from fable to fable; they found worship in the moment of recapture.

The four or five pages devoted to Socrates in this lecture prove, more than anything else in this volume, more than the Montaigne and the Bonaparte, that Emerson could make a racy and vital character-sketch. He tingles with delight to find his own moral ideal housing itself in the rudest, the savoriest, and the most whimsical of personalities. The ancient particulars seem here to rise, for the first time, to their full value, and the manner — that of the dispassionate observer, who inspects with a mixture of benevolence and caution the oddities of some unclassified echinus or torpedo — is chosen with unerring art. The impersonation is so delicate that the slightest intrusion of his own dialect, as in the unlucky phrase, "the tyrannous realist," operates as a passing disenchantment. One feels that Emerson would not have valued the peculiarities without the

soul ("my visor is Philemon's roof; within the house is Jove"); but, the soul once assured, every nub and crinkle upon the surface become inestimable.

Most readers will probably agree with Dr. Holmes that the lecture on Swedenborg is somewhat uninviting, and will fall in with his conjecture that Emerson's nearer view of Swedenborg disappointed the forecasts he had framed at a distance. Emerson seems to have undertaken — perhaps in a measure effected — the rehabilitation of the neglected mystic, but the occasion partakes rather of the melancholy of a disinterment than of the gladness of a resurrection. One can fancy Swedenborg moved to say now and then with Lear: "You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave." It is true that Emerson sets about his task with plenty of courage; the praise is cheerily begun and is gallantly maintained for a season; but the critical faculty is soon awake, and the havoc it works must have surprised even the operator. First, we hear that the great man is diffuse, then that he is unbalanced. Our admiration has hardly re-collected itself after this blow before it learns that he is pedantically literal and traditionally Hebraic. We recover from this *bouleversement* only to be plunged into new stupor by the fact that Swedenborg is morbidly suspicious of intellect and that his fancy is a breeding-place of nightmares. An enemy might, perhaps, content himself with this measure of castigation, but the merciless admirer is still unappeased. Swedenborg's universe is now discovered to be tedious and lustreless; he has some very wrong notions about sins; he is found to have a sad proclivity for the harboring of devils in his

creed; his hypothesis of revelation is viewed with the gravest displeasure; and lest, after all this, we should be charged with sacrificing truth to tenderness, we will say finally that he has no sympathy and is wholly wanting in imagination.

There are savages who beat their deities; Emerson, clearly, is a member of their tribe.

The lecture shows Emerson's honorable willingness to renounce piquancy when his path lies through plain facts, and his capacity to touch even the plain fact with grace. One loves a rhetorician brave enough to forego rhetoric.

Emerson's sympathy with Swedenborg was grounded on the participation of the two men in a few large ideas, and there was one point in which the sympathy was peculiar. Swedenborg was what Emerson sought for in vain among the mystics of past ages and the investigators of his own — the subordination of really high scientific accomplishments to mystical and philosophical ends.

The lecture on Montaigne begins at some distance from its subject; it ends also far from him; and Montaigne, who is fortunately a resourceful personage, is left to find such accommodation as he can in the middle. The opening paragraphs which sketch and contrast the abstractionists and the materialists are highly interesting, and one notes curiously how much fuller and racier is the picture of the materialists (whom Emerson disdained) than the account of the ideal philosophers. Between these two classes Emerson attempts to find a middle ground for the sceptics, with Montaigne as

standard-bearer. Whether Montaigne's position on the psychological chart is really defined with the exactness that Emerson intended is a matter which may itself afford play for a little scepticism. The air of precision is imposing, but the wary critic will not take the grave demureness with which Emerson dangles the footrule and poises the scales as conclusive evidence that the weighing and measuring have been accurately done.

We might say, perhaps, that while the intellectual *locus standi* is sufficiently defined, the *modus vivendi*, the actual substance of motive, interest, propulsion, in the sceptic's life, is either left undetermined or is identified with materialism. If you doubt the worth of sunsets and will never act on a doubt, what is left you but to sit down and eat your dinner with the avid herd to whom the notion of any competition between sunsets and roast beef would be unmeaning? It occurs also (as Emerson would say) that, while certainties are substantial, the idea that well-being is secured by planting our feet exclusively on certainties is a supposition, and we cannot act on the principle without infringing it. A man who assumes nothing assumes the wisdom of eschewing assumptions. Emerson is himself fundamentally no sceptic, and what we criticise here is not his final opinion, but the success of his careful attempt to give scepticism a tenable basis.

There follows the account of Montaigne, eight pages out of thirty-eight, modest quartering, it must be conceded, for a man in his own house. This description is of an unforgettable raciness, and smacks of Montaigne himself, except that it has less self-content and more

crispness. It is clearly not the thinker in Montaigne, — if we may separate the thinker from the *attitude*, — but the whole pungent and vital personality that attracts Emerson. He forgives to Montaigne things that he will forgive to no one else: the Gascon was a conformist, accepting marriage without inclination and the Catholic mass without faith; he even touched the acme of fatuity by Emersonian standards in talking freely of his own diseases. The traits which are common or vulgar in a contemporary are in Montaigne only manly refusals to be any better than his honest neighbors.

The extent of Emerson's partiality is hardly explained by the known facts. There is, of course, his love of the sceptic as the counterpoise to the dogmatist and the formalist; there is the relish for unconfessed probity; there is the winning combination of warm-bloodedness and cool-mindedness in the Frenchman; there is Montaigne's crisp French and there is Florio's spirited English; but one feels, at the end of this impressive catalogue, that some part of this outflowing homage must be charged to idiosyncrasy. The admiration is valuable to us, because it constitutes one of the chief saliencies and pungencies in the character of Emerson.

The lecture on "Shakespeare; or, The Poet," which follows must be ranked with the noblest eulogies in English. Shakespeare is not, indeed, conceived with the pith and realism that mark the drawing of Socrates and Montaigne; the impression that abides in the mind is one of something ample and godlike, a chivalric magnificence, a noble and sumptuous liberality. It is a great and richly peopled country that we survey, but we sur-

vey it from an elevation whence only a few grand features, nobly generalized and tempered by a pervasive sense of light and space, are visible to the rapt beholder. The freedom of style, so general in "Representative Men," reaches its culmination in these flowing pages.

Some surprises possibly await the reader who attempts to resolve into its elements the feeling of exaltation and enrichment with which he reads the last word of this inspiring lecture. Turning back to the earlier parts, he finds that, out of thirty-one pages devoted to so vast a theme as Shakespeare, Emerson has been able to spare twelve and a half for the discussion of the single topic of technical or surface originality. He finds that Emerson is throughout singularly free from the pressure of space, unfolding each topic with leisurely amplitude. He observes with surprise that the things which constitute Shakespeare's chief claim to honor in the eye of the public and the critics — his passion or tragic force, his humor, and his characterization — Emerson forbears to emphasize, forbears almost to mention; the whole case rests, apparently, on the poetry and the wisdom. He feels perhaps that, while the Emersonian estimate may be correct, it is not quite upheld by the Emersonian reasons. The specifiable and distinguishable thoughts are not too plentiful, and the truth of some of them is less clear than he could wish. He is not sure, for instance, that Shakespeare is the one person, in all modern history, known to us; he is disquieted by the assertion that the dramatic force is merely incidental; and he has some "compunctious visitings" about that affirmation of "equality of power in

farce, tragedy, narrative, and love-songs." As he turns the leaves, he notes how rarely his eye is caught by the name of a play, and, for all the emphasis on verbal expression, he meets only two quotations, one of them being the minute phrase "antres vast and desarts idle." In other points, the lecture shows both mastery of detail and princely affluence of illustration, but all is subordinated to the tendency to take what might be called the planetary view of Shakespeare, to simplify him into an integral and mighty orb, serenely luminous on the distant horizon.

The penalty of outgoing expectations is the release of expectations that one cannot meet. It is Shakespeare who now incurs this penalty. Emerson, having asked the world of this enchanter, and (contrary to all precedent) got it, proceeds to ask him for the skies, and, not getting them, is thrown into profound melancholy. Shakespeare is only master of the revels; he is not mystic and prophet. As Mr. Howells says, one "winces" under the severity of this judgment. The reader feels a little defrauded; he has perhaps quieted some misgivings of his own for the exhilaration of taking part with Emerson in this voyage of eulogy, and it is provoking to find himself half balked at the last moment by the misgivings of the eulogist. In one respect Emerson was more fortunate than his readers. Where praise and blame have the same object, they mingle in most men's minds; in Emerson's, they flow side by side in uncommunicating channels. The eulogist is housed with the detractor, but knows nothing of his fellow-tenant.

After every discount has been made, the lecture on

Shakespeare remains a performance which it would be hard to duplicate or to overvalue.

Napoleon, among his other prodigies, made Emerson for an hour or so a popular writer. The lecture on Bonaparte is singularly and generally readable, because the facts for once get their turn with the coruscations, because anecdote, unlike metaphor and epigram, relaxes tension at the same time that it affords stimulus, and because Emerson here met his readers at a rendezvous in their own territory. The picture in certain aspects is incomparably vivid, and the selection of efficiency as the main feature gives a real originality to a subject commonly viewed through a blaze — and of course, also, through a smoke — of pyrotechnics. The word "glory" scarcely occurs more than once in these pages, and the intention in that case is depreciatory. What dazzles Emerson is a relatively unpretending thing, — the scorn of custom, the exercise of common sense, the response to emergency, the simplification of means. It is practical intelligence, plain, sheer head-work, that he admires: he likes Arcola and Ulm and Austerlitz because in those encounters the fact was victorious.

The evidence offered for this proposition is striking; indeed, the lecture is a capital example of proof by apt, succinct illustration. One is not satisfied, however, with the choice of Napoleon as the representative of the fact: he is too conceited, too inflated, too tricky; he is half charlatan and the fact might be excused for disowning its representative. If efficiency is both creative and destructive, both upright and perfidious, why choose for its exponent a destroyer and a hypocrite?

Emerson, indeed, is far from blind to the defects of Napoleon; in fact, he forestalls the rod which his opponents are ready to apply by performing the flagellation with the most edifying diligence and heartiness. It is excellent strategy — though in Emerson it is not strategy but instinct — to silence one's opponents by stating their point with an energy that makes their own rhetoric both superfluous and feeble. The passage is a curious example of the dexterity of Emerson's hero-worship in adjusting itself to the straits and hardships to which it was reduced by the terrific lucidity of his perceptions. The ethical teacher now supervenes and adroitly turns to his own account this colossal structure which the hero-worshipper has built up, by proving that efficiency raised to the highest power cannot elude the moral law which holds Waterloos and St. Helenas in reserve for the discipline of egotists. The principle is lofty and the dexterity of the turn is magnificent, but, after all the good comradeship with Napoleon, does not this utterance remind us a little of the homiletics addressed by Prince Hal, after his accession, to the disreputable Sir John Falstaff?

Holmes writes aptly of the lecture on Goethe: "It flows rather languidly, toys with side issues as a stream loiters round a nook in its margin, and finds an excuse for play in every pebble." It takes Emerson about nine pages to arrive within sight of Goethe, and when he reaches his hero, an admiring glance and ceremonious bow expresses the total of his sensations. Emerson's efforts to like Goethe are only half successful; a polite host, he has this distinguished foreigner on his hands,

and makes the best of him: he reminds us of a certain Scotch laird in one of George Macdonald's novels, who was consciously anxious to entertain his guest and unconsciously anxious to see as little of him as possible. No other lecture in the volume is so meagre, no other so fluent to so relatively slight purpose. The mere manner, indeed, has a tranquil, self-respecting suavity suggestive of Goethe's own style, but there are places where Emerson, by unexampled mishap, almost fails in his endeavor to make points. He lingers before "Wilhelm Meister," unable to achieve clear utterance. Mephistopheles, however, is handled with characteristic incisiveness. With study, certain values can be extracted from the lecture; the genuineness of Goethe (if he was genuine) is set in relief by his evident self-pampering. Goethe, however, is peculiar in this respect, that none of his admirers has the smallest success in defining his attraction to people who do not know him, or, knowing him, do not feel his charm, and Emerson, who was half-hearted about the man, Goethe and half-hearted about the class, writer could not be expected to solve a problem which had baffled the attempts of enthusiasts.

"Representative Men" was issued in 1850; six years elapsed before the publication of the next prose volume, "English Traits." Shortly after his return from Europe, Emerson's views of England had been provisionally embodied in lectures, but years glided away in the ripening and perfecting of "English Traits," a work which might seem to have been extemporized in six weeks, so closely does it imitate the velocity and impetus of a missile. It is a work that tempts one to extend to books

the Emersonian declaration that every man is an impossibility until he is born. The author of "Nature" and the "Essays" had done his best to put himself out of the pale of the order of men who write such books as "English Traits," yet he was a man born to put the world to the inconvenience of revising its classifications. Here was the most exacting idealist perhaps who trod this planet in the mid-nineteenth century, a man impatient of Shelley, scornful of Dickens, condescending to Tennyson, charitable to Wordsworth, and viewing the great Carlyle himself with a mixture of love, awe, and consternation. He visits England in 1847–48, England as John Sterling saw it, as Charles Reade saw it, as Dickens saw it in the novels published between 1840 and 1860, as Carlyle saw it in "Past and Present," published in 1843, as Thackeray saw it in "Vanity Fair" in 1847, the very year of Emerson's arrival, as even the basking Tennyson saw it in "Maud," published in 1855. He sees Britain partly under the auspices of the ablest, the most censorious, and the most desponding of her sons; he tests English prosperity in the lanes of Manchester and English reality in the halls of Stafford House; and he returns home to publish, after allowing his sensations six years to cool, one of the warmest and most spontaneous eulogies ever dedicated to one nation by the citizen of another. There are reservations and censures, it is true; but they have no undue weight — indeed, they lack even their due weight — in the happy aggregate of the final impression.

Had Emerson measured England by his own standards of the desirable in literature, in politics, in morals,

and in religion, had he tried and sentenced *results*, the tone and effect of the book would have been altogether different. Results are normally mean and meagre, even when measured by standards that Emerson would have put aside as cheap. But if for the deeds of Hercules one substitutes his thews, if one passes, not forward to results, but backward to capacities, first taking the precaution to choose a people that is genuinely strong, he is liable to no such rigor of disappointment. For capacity is not a thing whose *shortcomings* are exposed by the precise demands of individual occasions; it chooses, in a way, its own weapons, its own tests; its failures in the broad survey are unemphatic and the pluses obscure even more than they outweigh the minuses. Simplify the case a little by applying it to another nation. Test modern Germany by its approach to predetermined goals in politics, literature, art, science, morals, and its insufficiencies would be conspicuous; but view its life to-day as a demonstration of national energy, and an impressive unification takes place which annuls for the moment the sense of shortcoming.[1]

It must be remembered that in 1849 Emerson was forty-four, an unfaltering, but at this date, an unhurried, idealist; that his relish of mere power, his respect for constitution, was extraordinary; that he loved, in his way, the distribution of energy into various planes; that he could view the trade and politics of England in the same preparatory and symbolic light in which the ordinary idealist views the cricketing and wrestling at Eton and the boating on the Thames. If the ordinary

[1] This passage was written before August, 1914.

idealist could perceive that the trade and politics are nothing but a form of cricketing and boating, he could view them with the same sense of their disciplinary and prophetic character which underlay Emerson's broad-minded lenity.

The attitude just noted — the attitude of the mature man on the cricket-field — explains the cordiality of "English Traits." There are, of course, many pages of qualifications and censure. Even a teacher of rhetoric may pardon a lusty young cricketer for his apathy on the subject of composition, but the immunity would cease the moment he essayed to reveal himself in literature. Hence the imperfections of the English in literature and religion are handled with the customary rigor; on these points Emerson's wants are too well defined to be quieted by a mere vague certificate of general ability. Men are severe toward attempts in their own specialty, and it is noticeable that, while Emerson overrates the English in the mass, he is disposed, as Miss Elizabeth Luther Cary has remarked, to scant his appreciation of their sensitiveness and spirituality. The great religious history of the English, the lyric fervors of the Anglo-Saxon piety, the minster-building of the Middle Ages, the martyrdoms of the sixteenth century, the Puritanism of the seventeenth, the Methodism of the eighteenth, are left untouched or casually fingered, while he devotes himself with almost equal zeal to the lashing of their Anglicanism and the celebration of their efficiency.

The inequality of attitude is curiously illustrated in the two adjacent chapters on "Literature" and the

"Times" (the newspaper). Now Emerson valued literature and scarcely respected journalism. We might rationally expect that the essay on literature would be a rhapsody and the essay on the "Times" a castigation. But what is the actual result? Emerson writes a castigation of literature (the literature of his contemporaries as distinguished from that of the admired Elizabethans) and a rhapsody on the "Times." The later chapter has an almost bugle-like enthusiasm; the success and power of that journal would seem to be registered in Emerson's heartbeats. But what are the methods of this paper, according to the evidence of its rapt but candid eulogist? Bluffing, time-serving, and truckling — duly and openly confessed, but barely audible to ears still resonant with the author's panegyrics.

We turn to the essay on literature. The same man who a moment ago admired vigor in journalism almost without reference to its aims, now insists that noble ends — the loftiest spiritual ends — are the condition that makes literature respectable. The vigor which insured a pardon to those questionable leader-writers in the "Times" shall not serve as a protection to this graceless *canaille* of a Thackeray, Dickens, and Macaulay. They shall not evade our justice by their probity, generosity, and tenderness, or the rest of that clucking train of poultry-yard and chimney-corner virtues. Are they Platonists? — that is the momentous question.

The explanation of this surface inconsistency is very easy. Emerson's spirituality was fastidious; his love of power, on the other hand, was almost indiscriminately hospitable. Everything, therefore, depended on whether

a given fact classified itself in his mind as an essay in spirituality or as a manifestation of power.

In spite of the presence, in "English Traits," of a great enthusiasm and a large disappointment, which have never come to any mutual understanding or adjustment of claims, the work in its totality seems unified and concentrated. It is, indeed, the luckiest, though not the greatest, of Emerson's productions. A subject which commanded universal interest was treated from a point of view with which every one could sympathize and embodied in language that every one, or nearly every one, could understand. Now and then a confusion arises from the simultaneous pursuit of two or three lines of exposition without forethought as to the place or mode of intersection. A singular instance of this placid entertainment of seeming incongruities is found in the attractive chapter on "Manners." On page 104, the Englishman's "vivacity" betrays itself at all points; by page 112, he has acquired "cold, repressive manners." On the same page 112, England is "mediocrity intrenched and consolidated," but let the admirer not lose hope, for on page 114, her *bon-mots* are as good as the French. On page 104, the Englishman "speaks with all his body," but by page 112 he has reached the point of requiring "a tone of voice that excites no attention in the room." On page 105, eccentricity is freely allowed, but this lawlessness of page 105 is rebuked by page 112, which declares that "a severe decorum rules the court and the cottage." On page 105, an Englishman is licensed "to wear a wig, or a shawl, or a saddle," but the privilege is withdrawn on page 107 to make

way for "a certain order and complete propriety" in dress.

We smile at these inconsistencies, reserving, perhaps, a fraction of the smile for the logicians who receive them with undue solemnity. A liberal and candid mind can well imagine that all these things may be true, and if the mode of presentation is confusing, that may be a point the less of resemblance to literature, but also a point the more of congruity with life.

Another sort of difficulty is shown in the interesting but involved and proportionless chapter on "Race." The Celt is disposed of in a scant paragraph, thrust into a corner like his race. The Norman overbears the Saxon as at a new Hastings, and there is a silent mixture of the two races in a fashion consonant with English history.

Mr. J. J. Chapman, author of one of the ablest critical estimates of Emerson, declares "English Traits" to be his "ruddiest" book. A different adjective — the most impetuous, perhaps, or the most electrical — might have seemed preferable to other minds, but of the reality of the merit thus variously indicated there can be no question. At fifty-three, an author's style may be still mobile, but it rarely moves in the direction of impetus and vigor; Emerson, more serious in earlier volumes, had never been so eager or alert. What he said of England, that it was well packed and well saved, may be said of his book. Emerson could always pack, but in "English Traits" the facts to be grouped were homogeneous and adaptable, and the total result showed not merely compression but rare suppleness and elasticity. These are marching, they are almost racing, sentences;

there is an effect of high pressure, rising sometimes, as in the chapter on "Truth," almost to overcharge.

"English Traits" ranks high among the works of its author and among treatments of its subject. As a piece of craftsmanship, as an adaptation of means to ends, it is first among the achievements of a man who was prone to give too much or too little or too much and too little, and was rarely content with just enough. It is peculiar among Emerson's works in its relative suppression of peculiarity, and is therefore, of all his books, the least eccentric in relation to literature at large. To sum up, the claims of the work are high; it is the seizure of a strong fact by a strong mind, with adequate sympathy.

The "Conduct of Life," a series of essays, appeared in 1860. It was based on a course of lectures originally delivered in Pittsburg, in March, 1851, afterwards repeated in Boston, and slowly digested and matured between platform and study.

In the "Essays," particularly in the first series, Emerson had sketched, though he had not formulated, a constitution for that tottering little republic, the individual soul. In the "Conduct of Life" he passed from the constitution to the administration of that organism; he saw its principles in the light of practice. Yesterday we chose between Athens and Samarcand as the goal of our journey; to-day we must pack our trunk; enough if white columns and palms are glimpsed vision-wise here and there through the rifts in the preparation. There is — in a high Emersonian version or paraphrase, of course — a plain effect of "settling down to business"; we are brisk enough; we are cheerful enough; but the

day's work with its responsibilities and vetoes is under way. The paragraphs, taken as wholes, have a solidity, tenacity, and soberness hardly found in the paragraphs of the earlier volumes; as blocks, they are a trifle austere; they must be pulverized before they coruscate. There is greater evenness of tone, which ought to be an artistic help by the subduing of disparities into consonance: in point of fact, one misses the sprightliness of change.

Emerson's central attitude is still strongly personal and subjective; but the frequent resort to facts — even to the impersonal facts one procures from conversation and books, from the file of newspapers and the budget of statistics — gives an appearance — a *wash*, so to speak — of objectivity to the work. The first personal pronoun — in Emerson never riotously personal — is less noticeable in the "Conduct of Life." We had the curiosity to open the book eight times at random to give precision to our notion of the kind of topic prevalent in these essays. The list is as follows: First, the man who knows men is competent on all topics; second, a bad institution takes worth out of your dollar; third, Americans have, not water on the brain, but a little gas; fourth, the drawing-room is unfit for earnest minds; fifth, nothing is impenetrable to gossip; sixth, the last lesson of life is voluntary obedience or necessitated freedom; seventh, a fool or fanatic can derange a whole household; eighth, the Mammoth Cave mimics the firmament in its "Star-Chamber." This is not low ground assuredly, but shelving ground with the greater expansiveness on the lower ledges.

It should be remembered that Emerson had now reached his fifth decade, a time of life when facts are prone to be importunate, that his children were reaching ages which deepen the interest of parents in environment, that his visit to Europe had been a plunge into actuality, that America and its problems had never so pierced his tranquillity as in the fateful and stormy decade between 1850 and 1860. It should also be remembered that the book retracts nothing; the old idealisms are steadily maintained, or held, rather, in the proud negligence of security. There are no retreats; there are only inclusions. One trait in the volume is a little surprising to us. With its rich freightage of facts, with the author's matchless felicity in the illumination of materialities, with its occupancy, in good measure, of ground common to Emerson and the wiser public, one might have prophesied an approach to the genial and popular character of "English Traits." For its failure to attain this quality, three reasons may be modestly suggested: the facts, clear-cut as they are, are beaded on abstractions, fate, power, culture, illusions, which are even more imponderable than self-reliance, compensation, love, and friendship; the optimism is daring to the point of hazarding its own safety; and the book fell in the middle zone of Emerson's career where it missed both the rapt, clear glow of young enthusiasm in the earlier essays and the gracious refulgence of his ripened age.

In the remarkable essay entitled "Fate," by a curious novelty of definition, whatever is friendly to spiritual growth — even though indirectly and remotely —

is listed under freedom; whatever opposes or confines that growth is classed as fate. It is chiefly interesting by the extraordinary avidity and pungency with which the forces that oppose liberty — cataclysm, environment, organization, heredity — are collected and presented by their intrepid and magnanimous opponent. So might Herodotus, secure of Salamis, gloat over the number and diversity of the barbaric tribes assembled by Xerxes in the memorable bay. The language, a trifle wilful, even, if one chooses, a little madcap and impish in its superlatives, is of a strange vividness, audacity, and expressiveness. It affects the mind sometimes with a mixture of admiration and dismay.

The essay on "Power," a shorter, lighter, less striking, and more readable performance, shows a characteristic liking for Andrew Jackson, for autocrats, almost, indeed, for blackguards and libertines. The highwayman, as we remember, is not expressly endorsed, and the canonization of the pirate is left to the inference of the more masculine readers. Emerson, sitting in his fireproof universe, admires the activity of the torch-bearer and fire-kindlers. The common man's morals unfortunately are not lined with asbestos.

Readers conversant with the light, free-hearted way in which Emerson is wont to approach the little pastimes of agriculture and gayeties of commerce might anticipate much from the essay on "Wealth." Those expectations are partly disappointed by the ambiguity of the plan and the large and casual promiscuity of topics. For Dr. Holmes, the essay is Franklinesque, but one doubts if Franklin would have recognized his

shrewd self in its affirmations. The essay is almost too clever to be shrewd. It is half of shrewdness not to be too clever.

Of the essay on "Culture" it may be briefly said that its truth is in the main incontestable, that its sense and penetration are noteworthy, and that it contains many well-put things on a general ground that is somewhat colorless and unexciting. With the exception of two or three large suggestions in the closing paragraphs, the essay is busy, nimble, watchful, birdlike, hopping briskly from topic, and deftly picking up many scattered crumbs of observation.

That mysticism is "commanding" in the sense in which a stronghold or a peak commands the lower landscape is indicated by the sureness and keenness of the judgments of character in "Behavior." Off the tripod, Emerson is seen by all to be an oracle. The observation is of the best sort, that which is applied or assimilated, converted into tissue on the spot — the blackberry eaten as soon as plucked. Emerson as reporter is charming, and each fact exhales a satisfying philosophy.

"Some of my friends," so begins the essay on "Worship," "have complained . . . that we discussed Fate, Power, and Wealth on too low a platform; gave too much line to the evil spirit of the times; too many cakes to Cerberus; that we ran Cudworth's risk of making, by excess of candor, the argument of atheism so strong that he could not answer it." He then proceeds, with a sincerity and a suavity that charm while they provoke us, to prove how completely at ease he finds himself upon these matters; as if, forsooth, it were about *his* safety

that we were worrying. Let Orpheus traverse hell, if he so chooses. Who gave *us* a lyre wherewith to charm the monster? "I dip my pen," he says, in a delightful sentence, "in the blackest ink, because I am not afraid of falling into my inkpot." We anticipate a counterblast to the negations, but no, we are shortly served with a diatribe on the faithlessness and godlessness of our own time, in which the iconoclasm and the energy of the sinning essays on Fate, Power, and the like are only too faithfully reproduced. Cerberus has had another cake: one begins to fear that the surliness of that ill-conditioned animal may speedily be augmented by dyspepsia.

Does Emerson finally succeed in writing the lofty chant which the opening of the essay had foreshadowed? Yes and No. There are lofty notes, but they are intermixed with many matters on a lower level — things mostly sane and true, no doubt, but fitted to instruct or supplement or illustrate rather than to convince or inspire. "Worship" is no second "Over-Soul," yet it ranks with those essays which the admirers of Emerson could ill spare.

"Considerations by the Way" need not detain us; it is chiefly distinguishable by its unlucky title which justly reflects the promiscuity of its contents.

"Beauty" is a close-packed, highly intellectual essay, offering so many clarifying suggestions and explanations that we are a little embarrassed by the very abundance of our helps. Emerson's "beauty" is dynamic, intensely and variously active; and its nature seems, on all sides, copiously referential and associative. It is related to *intellect* as manifestation and bait; it is organic,

a consequence of *health;* it is necessary, the product of *use;* it is inseparable from *grace;* it is concerned with *expression;* it is ancillary to *character;* in sum and lastly, it expresses the cosmic and the divine. Indeed, between its causes, its transformations, and its fluidity the notion of beauty wavers a little to our eyes. We are confused, in finding the man, by the very multitude of the addresses. This plasticity, however, this mobility, this disengaged and uncommitted character which attends beauty through its multiplied fellowships and affinities, is exactly what appealed to Emerson; he loved definition but he hated finality.

"Illusions," the final essay, is a remarkable and curious performance. It has a powerful and penetrating suggestiveness, breeding, by its startling hints and glimpses, a passing terror of Emerson, correspondent to our terror of the unknown universe. We have a half-exhilarated sense of the practice of espionage on the Almighty, of laying our ear, at Emerson's bidding, to the keyhole of the council-room of God. The tragic solemnity which might have ensued has been prevented or diminished by the adoption of a treatment, which is relatively, to the subject at least, tentative, easy, and enlivening. This alleviative procedure awakens a somewhat qualified gratitude, the gratitude of those who have been spared a pang but denied a sensation.

The placidity and mellowness of the period between the close of the Civil War and the beginnings of decline is reflected in the volume of essays published in 1870 under the leisurely and comfortable title, "Society and Solitude." They are the cheeriest of Emerson's essays,

bearing the same relation to the "First Series" that Maeterlinck's "Double Garden" bears to the "Treasure of the Humble." It is still Sunday, no doubt, but it is Sunday afternoon. Many of the titles, "Civilization," "Art," "Eloquence," "Domestic Life," "Farming," "Books," "Clubs," suggest the author's engagement with the solaces and commodities of life. In "Domestic Life" and "Farming" we find ourselves in the placid lowlands. There is a falling-off in impetus. The earlier essays breathed the urgency of the aroused propagandist; in the "Conduct of Life" the excitement of throwing cakes to Cerberus kept the style alert and zestful. But in "Society and Solitude," a point has been reached where all the ideas of first-rate importance to Emerson are restatements, and hence, of course, where the novelties are all subsidiary. This need not have detracted from the charm or even the utility of the work, for Emerson's practice confirms the conjecture that the direct rays of spirituality are sometimes less effective than the reflection of its beams from neutral objects: the minister softens more hearts in the church vestibule than in the pulpit. But one result is unavoidable, a slackening of tension. "Society and Solitude" has less momentum than the earlier works.

The initial essay, "Society and Solitude," which supplies a title for the volume, "Civilization," "Farming," "Success," and "Old Age" fall naturally together into a little group of care-free, friendly, genial essays, leaning to pithiness, to familiarity, sometimes to boyishness. "Books" has a richer aroma, but shares with the quintet just specified a briskness that passes at a touch into

gayety. Emerson runs down the centuries like a boy by the side of a fence, touching every post blithely. Still very fond of books, he has reached a point where he takes his ease in their society, and is quite as much indulgent as respectful. "Domestic Life" is chiefly notable for two admired descriptions, both redolent of autobiography and domesticity, the one dedicated to babies, the other to the growing lads of a needy family. The circumspection — shall we say the tiptoeing? — of the pleased father in the earlier sketch is racily comic, and, in the second picture, the eager, shy, compressed, half-furtive life of Emerson and his brothers is drawn with a vividness that reveals both the beauty and the peril of that high-strung, generous boyhood.

"Clubs" is easily forgettable. "Eloquence" has a kind of dishevelled opulence. "Courage" is the one essay of heroic carriage in this amicable and gracious volume, and one is glad to see Capulet rushing once more into the street in his gown, and crying out: "What noise is this? Give me my long sword, ho!" "Art," opening with a bold, broad, loose, and yet striking definition of its subject, proceeds to surprise us with something very like a consistent defence of a formal thesis. The middle part of "Works and Days" — one is tempted to say — excels in free, happy lyricism everything since "Beauty" and "Illusions" — everything perhaps since "The Over-Soul."

"Letters and Social Aims," as a whole, repeats the neutrality of subject, the geniality of tone, and the want of novelty in thought, which was noted in "Society and Solitude," and the laxity in structure has become more

noticeable. A certain leanness or poverty is discernible in "Persian Poetry," in the "Progress of Culture," and in "Social Aims"; and "Resources" is only saved from a like condemnation by a conclusion in the author's highest key. "Greatness," "Inspiration," and "Eloquence" constitute a second, somewhat higher, range of essay in which agreeableness of a quite authentic brand must serve as substitute for power. Better yet, perhaps, but better in the same vein, are "Quotation and Originality" and the longer treatise on "Poetry and Imagination." The former is genial, hospitable, pithy; in the latter, we find Emerson on his own estate, or, more than that, in his own orchard and conservatory. The structure is of the familiar looseness which we have learned by this time to recognize affectionately as we might the flying hair or twisted neckcloth of some near relative.

There remain two essays of moment, "The Comic" and "Immortality." The first of these, though falling short of adequacy both in solutions and questions, is penetrative, tactical, and prolific in suggestions. Emerson's interest in the theme is readily explicable. Humor, indeed, should grow with moral ascension. Man sees the joke that is pointless to the animal, because man lives on several planes, the animal on one. Lift up the man, multiply the planes, produce an Emerson, and the room for difference, for the criticism of one estimate by its successor and superior, is correspondingly enlarged. "Immortality" oscillates between Emerson's two dispositions in this matter, the disposition to affirm the fact and the disposition to waive the topic as prying and impertinent. He offers depth of consciousness as a sub-

stitute for immortality, but has moods in which he himself questions the desirability of the exchange. That the profoundest consciousness of our time was divided between the prevision of immortality and the disdain of it is the most useful datum obtainable from the essay.

Our critique of "Lectures and Biographical Sketches" (published after Emerson's death) may confine itself to the matter indicated by the second element in the title. In "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England," Emerson dispenses his ambrosial substitute for gossip in a commemorative feast in which varied and rapid courses uphold the fame of the cuisine; the close of the book contains sketches of Ezra Ripley (Emerson's grandfather by marriage), Samuel Hoar, George L. Stearns, Mary Moody Emerson, Carlyle, and Thoreau. Three traits may be noted in these sketches: first, Emerson's insatiable relish for humanity; second, his power to associate blame and praise without blending them — namely, without tempering the effect of the praise; third, the tendency to be clearer in the portrayal of high-minded conventionalists like Dr. Ripley and Mr. Hoar than in that of natures more consonant with his own, such as Thoreau and his memorable aunt. As for the "Carlyle," it is vigor etched in vigor — a shaggy son of Anak done to the life by an imagination half daunted but wholly kindled by the splendid barbarism of its theme.

"The Natural History of Intellect," the short treatise from which the third of the posthumous volumes derives its title, is a novel experiment. It is Emerson's own attempt to give quasi-formal expression to his psychology; and it is an attempt of Harvard College to

obey Emerson's own counsel to bring the man of direct vision into contact with its students. Neither the reports of the day nor the printed version of the Harvard lectures of 1870–71 justify us in concluding that either attempt was highly successful. Even the pacific Mr. Cabot becomes controversial as to Emerson's handling of his theme, and the seeker for criticism is referred to those pages of the "Memoir" (633–43), in which a "soft pounding" is administered to the sage by his loyal biographer. A certain tranquillity in Harvard's reception of these courses is not to be listed among the grave sins of that not quite blameless institution: the ideas could not be new, and, so far as utterance went, the Emerson of sixty-eight had a dangerous competitor in the person of the Emerson of thirty-five.

The remainder of the volume is chiefly noteworthy for three discreet and not strongly individualized papers on "Boston," "Michael Angelo," and "Milton," and for a series of reprints from the "Dial," among which the penetrating reviews of "Walter Savage Landor" and of "Past and Present" will be slow to depart from the reader's memory.

CHAPTER V

EMERSON AS PROSE-WRITER

A GLANCE at Emerson's literary equipment may fitly precede a critique of his prose.

I. CULTURE

It is a fashion of late years to speak rather slightingly of Emerson's scholarship and culture. We deny him the general merits, unperturbed by the curiously good showing he makes in various particulars. We are clear that he was no linguist; in the comfort of which persuasion shall we not throw a crumb to his admirers in the admission that he knew — sparingly, of course — Greek, Latin, Italian, German, and French? We are cheerfully agreed that his reading was desultory: no wise man will be moved by the fact that it was a most accommodating desultoriness — a desultoriness so liberal, indeed, as to permit its possessor to know Shakespeare almost by heart, to read Goethe through in the original, and to master pretty much all the material available in English in a field so abstruse as Neo-Platonist philosophy. We know that his reading was not catholic, whatever rash inferences the hasty reader may draw from the inclusion of five writers so diverse as Plato, Swedenborg, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and Goethe in the single volume of "Representative Men." We repose in his want of scholarship; in view of which

the trifling fact that he quoted more freely, more variously, and more ably than almost any writer of his time may be admitted with a tranquil soul.

The question of his culture it would be futile to debate. Where the facts are tolerably clear, and the general term under which it is proposed to group them is variously and loosely employed, common sense suggests the propriety of stating the facts and relinquishing the discussion. Most men would probably agree that the essence of culture is appreciativeness — appreciativeness of the finer values, æsthetic, intellectual, spiritual. That some catholicity and some discrimination should mark this receptiveness would generally be conceded; dispute might arise as to the relative weight to be ascribed to the three constituents, æsthetic, intellectual, and spiritual, and to the three qualities, intensity, catholicity, accuracy. We venture to tabulate Emerson's receptivities and opacities in two columns:—

Sensibility	*Sensibility*
To religious and ethical appeals — unsurpassed in quality, intensity, and range.	
To natural beauty, especially in landscape and woman, — very great.	
To the arts of poetry and eloquence — very great.	To the arts of painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and acting — weak.
To literature — intense, though limited and freakish.	To literature — limited and freakish, though intense.
To conversation — keen.	
To science — inexpert but keen.	
To daily practical life — keen.	

This is no discreditable showing. Put Emerson in the same scales with even so high an exemplar and exponent

of culture as Matthew Arnold, and the outcome is far from ignominious. By the test of such a table Arnold would be inferior, though still notable, in ethical and religious sensibility, and in responsiveness to natural beauty; inferior likewise in response to the higher meanings of science and daily life. In the plastic arts, music, and acting, he would rank, we presume, with Emerson; and his superiority would be confined to the catholicity and precision — not the intensity — of his reaction to literature, including poetry. If scholarship be included in culture, Arnold's relative position would be strengthened.

Let each reader decide for himself whether the possessor of the above resources was a cultured man. The general feeling will probably be that even a barbarian, so endowed, would be enviable.

II. Criticism

On the ticklish point of Emerson's literary criticism, let us bring together a few of his most damning (some writers would say self-damning) estimates at once. He called "Pickwick Papers" the "poor Pickwick stuff." [1] He found none of Hawthorne's books "worthy of his genius . . . they are too young." [2] "Shelley is never a poet. . . . Imagination . . . he has not." [3] Miss Austen's novels seemed to him "vulgar in tone, sterile in artistic invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit, or knowledge of the world." [4]

[1] *Jour.* IV, 436.
[2] Cabot, I, 377.
[3] *Jour.* V, 344.
[4] *Jour.* IX, 336.

These judgments may be thought conclusive as to their author, and, indeed, they do peremptorily set aside his claim to *authority* in criticism. The case, however, will repay a little study.

Figure to yourself a passion for literature *as such*, an intense preoccupation with spiritual ends, and an existing world-literature whose ends are for the most part mundane; a great passion crossed and confused by a fundamental misunderstanding; and the difficulties of adequate criticism on Emerson's part become clear.

But if Emerson could extract good from every secular fact in life, why could he not turn the images of secular facts in literature to the same use? The answer may be put thus: the living fact may be insulated, and its spirit is, for Emerson, divine; the literary fact is a constituent of a whole, and the informing spirit is that of an author with whom one is likely enough to be discordant.

Emerson put the highest valuation on the momentary, isolated experience. A man of this type will love those elements of literature which can contract their power into a moment. He will value, therefore, the *thought* in its imposing brevity, its crystalline or stellar form, and he will love Plato, Bacon, Landor, Coleridge, and Goethe. He will value the *image*, particularly the symbolic image, and will take pleasure in Behmen and George Herbert. He will value the *phrase*, especially the imaginatively expressive phrase, and his reverence for Shakespeare will be boundless. He will value the *anecdote* as distinct from the long narrative, and for this reason (not ex-

cluding others) he will go eagerly to Plutarch and Montaigne.

Emerson is sensitive likewise to certain forms of atmosphere and spirit in a work, which, although they pervade an entire composition, are capable of expression in the single sentence. The two qualities of strongest appeal were the religious strain which he found in various bibles, in Plato, in Plotinus, and in Herbert, and the strain of racy, masterful, constitutional vigor which made him an admirer of Montaigne, of Ben Jonson, of the "Biglow Papers," and of "Leaves of Grass." It was the good fortune of Carlyle, so far as the holding of Emerson's admiration was concerned, to fall into the second of these categories in falling out of the first, and Emerson showed a real versatility and breadth in adapting to the Berserker the homage originally moulded to the form of the seer.

The indifference to novels in conjunction with the relish for anecdote sustains the contention of Mr. Brownell [1] that he had no feeling for art — that is, for the combinations and harmonies of masses — in the works of other men. That it was the novel as a genus rather than particular authors whom he disliked seems pretty well established by his impartial and emphatic rejection of three authors so startlingly different as Hawthorne, Jane Austen, and Charles Dickens. The disparity in valuations, which was his chief point of estrangement from his fellow-men, came out conspicuously in the novel, with its tireless emphasis on money or marriage or physical safety or — what wearied Emer-

[1] Brownell, *American Prose Masters*, 186–87.

son almost as much — the stringencies of temptation and remorse. It must be granted that when we have thus provided him with one of those general incapacities which serve — one hardly knows why — as a shelter for particular defects, he abuses our kindness in his presumptuous interest in Scott. When a man has rejected the gun and the fishing-rod as juvenile, he has cut himself off from the public display of his affection for the skate or tennis racquet.

Emerson's fondness for Scott's novels and for Homer's poems is partly, perhaps, explicable from boyish associations, partly from the common exhibition by these adventurous fictions of three traits to which his response was cordial: primitive virility, martial images, and courtly, generous manners. His attachment to Shakespeare appears to have been quite unrelated to any interest in drama or narrative: it embraced little more than the poetry and the wisdom. His attitude toward his beloved poet is peculiar almost to anomaly: he first cuts out half the man and then expands the other half to make good the difference.

Did Emerson love poetry as such, apart, let us say, from his profound interest in religion and in symbolism? Could he delight in pure music, in pure expression, without a pious afterthought? The affirmative evidence seems incontestable. He quoted as an example of exquisite verse Beaumont and Fletcher's lines on melancholy, "Hence all ye vain delights," [1] a poem surely innocent of sanctity. He cites, in illustration of Shakespeare's poetic felicity, the equally undidactic lines: —

[1] "Poetry and Imagination," VIII, 55.

"What may this mean,
That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
Revisit'st thus the glimpses of the moon?" [1]

He quotes with homage Collins's "Bubbling runnels joined the sound" and Tennyson's brief phrase, the "stammering thunder," [2] passages whose destitution of everything but sheer poetry stamps their admirers as responsive to the pure cry. That Shelley, who gives us what might be called the vapor of landscape, should have appealed little to a man who saw nature as if etched on steel, is not inexplicable to the discerning, and the unlucky description of Dante as "another Zerah Colburn" [3] (a mathematical prodigy) has been caught up with an avidity which sober criticism can hardly endorse. What Emerson meant, and how much else he meant, is brought out by a passage in "Poetry and Imagination," in which, after exalting the union of freedom with precision, he says that "Dante was free imagination, — all wings, — yet he wrote like Euclid." [4]

Emerson was often wrong and often right in his literary judgments: when he was wrong, he was sometimes laughable; when he was right, he was usually profound. Even when he is least judicious, he is often discerning; in his sweeping condemnation of Miss Austen, for instance, he fixes shrewdly on Miss Austen's capital defect — her narrow, even vulgar, conception of life. An authority in criticism — a man, that is, whose opinion weighs with us beyond our instinctive perception of its rightness in the particular case — he can never be; but

[1] "Shakspeare," IV, 207.
[2] *Jour.* IX, 209.
[3] Cabot, I, 290.
[4] "Poetry and Imagination," VIII, 72.

a great nature speaking frankly on one of its leading interests cannot fail to be often wise or to instruct us even in its aberrations.

III. Clearness

Dr. Garnett writes of the individual sentence in Emerson: "His thought is transparent and almost chillingly clear." [1] For most men, the clarity is hardly of the sort that regulates the temperature. It is true, nevertheless, that for Emerson, as for Browning and Meredith, around the *fact* of obscurity an *illusion* of greater obscurity has grown up. The trouble with Emerson is more often strangeness than dimness; the indistinctness of the moral Monadnock or Agiochook which he points out to us is due rather to the distance of the peak than to the haze in the atmosphere. He is less obscure to-day because time has shortened the distance. "Self-Reliance" and "Compensation" have tinctured the air, and the study of the parents has borne fruit in the swifter intuitions of the children. Fifty years of approach have lightened many difficulties, and one reflects curiously that fifty years of recession, should they occur, might involve our grandchildren in the same perplexities which befogged our grandsires.

IV. Coherence

The articulation of the sentences within the paragraph is a point on which the public has been grossly misled. Among the grossest of its deceivers is Emerson himself whose declaration that each of his sentences was

[1] Garnett, 75.

an "infinitely repellent particle" deserves incarceration in the same pound with the assertion that he did not know what an argument meant. His paragraphs will usually bear analysis; they sustain analysis better — sometimes — than perusal; and a second reading strengthens their coherence. In other words, a distinction must be made between the *cogency* and the *transparency* of the sequence; the connection between two thoughts is often intimate enough, but the passage as Mr. Macy suggests is underground.[1]

The absence or rarity of connecting particles in Emerson's style is sometimes rashly assumed to be an evidence of an equal want of sequence in the thought. But here a misunderstanding exists which the citation of two passages from Macaulay — a writer of impeccable sequence — may aid us to disentangle. The first is from the description of the Puritans:[2] —

"Events which short-sighted politicians ascribed to earthly causes, had been ordained on his account. For his sake empires had risen, and flourished, and decayed. For his sake the Almighty had proclaimed his will by the pen of the Evangelist, and the harp of the prophet. He has been wrested by no common deliverer from the grasp of no common foe. He had been ransomed by the sweat of no vulgar agony, by the blood of no earthly sacrifice. It was for him that the sun had been darkened, that the rocks had been rent, that the dead had risen, that all nature had shuddered at the sufferings of her expiring God."

[1] Macy, *Spirit of Amer. Lit.* 70.
[2] Macaulay, *Works*, I, 255–56.

The second passage treats of government in relation to the claims of the Jews (connectives underscored):[1]

"*If* it be right that the property of men should be protected, and *if* this can only be done by means of government, *then* it must be right that government should exist. *Now* there cannot be government unless some person or persons possess political power. *Therefore* it is right that some person or persons possess political power. *That is to say*, some person or persons must have a right to political power."

It is clear that the first of these passages is devoid of formal articulations, that the second is sown with them and profits much by their support, and that, nevertheless, the earlier passage exhibits a solidarity with which its successor cannot pretend to compete. If you carry irregular or nondescript objects, toys, kitchen utensils, pine knots, some kind of external ligature, rope, basket, knapsack, becomes indispensable. But if you carry planed blocks of equal size, the mere likeness is a substitute for cohesion, and the armful is commodious without aids.

Now the Emersonian paragraph, without obeying any rigid law and with no scant measure of elasticity, *tends* to assume the form of the first citation from Macaulay; it *tends* to furnish several illustrations or several restatements of one law. Hence, to the extent of this tendency, the absence of connectives fails to injure coherence.

The prevalent impression that the Emersonian paragraph is a dust-heap — gold-dust, indeed, but for all

[1] Macaulay, *Works*, II, 308.

that a heap — is due partly no doubt to the fame of his epigrams. It is thoughtlessly assumed that fitness for effective detachment must imply as a corollary unfitness for effective union. But the analogy of matter — and of society, also, for that matter — shows that independence and adaptiveness (or sociability) are far from inconsistent properties. A square or a diamond stands out in effective distinctness, when isolated, but it blends admirably with figures of its class in a checkerboard, a chimney-piece, or a mosaic pavement. Take, for instance, the apparently abrupt and unaccommodating dictum, "Imitation is suicide," and see how deftly it is wrought into the solid fabric of a sentence such as this: "There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better for worse as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till." [1]

While due allowance, therefore, should be made for Emerson's reluctance to advertise — or even sometimes to announce — the articulation of successive sentences, it is time surely to bury the legend that he worked in pellicles, that his composition is a fall of snowflakes. The whole fascination of life for him lay in the disclosure of identity in variety, that is, in the concurrence, the *running together*, of several distinct images or ideas. It would be suggestive, and not wholly inaccurate, to aver that he *thought* in *paragraphs*.

[1] "Self-Reliance," II, 46.

The theory of formlessness in the compositions as a whole may be promptly put aside. Those who prefer to read Emerson's essays backward may be left without question to the unhindered enjoyment of this innocent form of calisthenics. But the true critic will perceive that method, in some form or degree, is universal in Emerson. We should say that his aptitude for method was mediocre, permitting him, in lucky subjects and genial moods, to approach excellence, and in refractory subjects or unruly moods, to sink to the plane of badness. At its lowest, however, it is far above chaos.

On this topic on which honest investigation is as rare as loose talk is plentiful, a few specifications will be in place.

First, the method deteriorates in advancing life.

Second, the pure or abstract essays are of looser fabric than the works strongly tinctured with concrete fact or practical import.

Third, Emerson had a good eye for simple likeness and direct contrast. When his matter is capable of subjection to these obvious principles, his success in organization is considerable.

Fourth, Emerson frequently numbers his points, a practice which is thought to be the acme, almost the pedantry, of order.

Fifth, Emerson failed to distinguish sharply between related ideas; the same thought sometimes occurs twice in one essay,[1] or two thoughts which are kinsmen and should be neighbors are kept apart by comparatively alien ideas.[2]

[1] "The Poet," III (two examples).
[2] "Character," III (three examples).

Sixth, Emerson's wish to get his whole philosophy into each essay tended toward sameness and promiscuity at once; it made the *essays similar* and the *paragraphs diverse.*

Seventh, Emerson's feeling for conclusions was strong; what he found hard was to make his conclusion his stopping-place. Too many essays resemble "Compensation" in having what might be called recurving tips: they end, so to speak, in a footnote.[1]

It may be added, in conclusion, that, in both the paragraph and the essay, the order is better than it seems to be, and this absence of the *look* of order must be counted as an æsthetic defect. The æsthetic sense has more to do with our judgments of the merits of plans than we should willingly suppose, and Emerson's building, even when sound, rarely produces the *effect* of architecture.

V. English

Emerson's relation to the grammar of his native tongue may be defined as a constitutional negligence superposed upon an inculcated carefulness. He was normally a loose writer, who had taken to heart in childhood a stringent tradition. Hence a general effect and air of strictness in his work, accompanied by frequent occasions when his English — to use a homely term — stretches itself. His grammar could unbend at intervals, as his Puritanism countenanced a rare cigar or glass of wine.

He uses unfamiliar preterites and participles, which

[1] "Compensation," II, 124–27.

are rather antiquated than inaccurate; "sprung" and "begun" in the past tense and the once fashionable "having drank" and "have rode." [1] Carlyle perhaps is responsible for his predilection for quaint comparatives, "liker," "perfecter," "easilier," [2] and for matronly and buxom superlatives, "subtilest," "cheerfulest," "learnedest," "willingliest." [3] He never hesitates to invest an adjective that chances to end in "ly" with all the prerogatives of an adverb, and uses "orderly" and "masterly" and even "jolly" as modifiers of verbs with the most edifying intrepidity.[4] He uses that snare for the unwary, the hanging or unattached participle, the participle in disjunction from a noun, with a freedom which places him at a bound on a level with the noblest of the English classics.[5] He disappoints us a little by a pretty strict loyalty to the orthodox tradition in the matter of "shall" and "will," but regains our regard by an explicit, though rare, surrender to the enticements of the split infinitive. In the "Journals" we find "to not exasperate," and in "Society and Solitude" "to fairly disengage." [6] A phrase like "intended to have dispatched this letter" [7] awakens in him no debile compunctions, and he writes "thou from speech refrained" [8] with the aplomb of the callous transgressor.

[1] "Boston," XII, 209; *Jour.* VII, 489; *Poems*, IX, 312; *English Traits*, V, 303.

[2] *Jour.* IX, 245; "Poetry and Imagination," VIII, 39; *Jour.* IX, 531.

[3] "Poetry and Imagination," VIII, 7; *C. E. C.* I, 34; "Success," VII, 292; "Domestic Life," VII, 109.

[4] *English Traits*, 80; "Courage," VII, 268; *English Traits*, 70.

[5] "Worship," VI, 233; "Poetry and Imagination," VIII, 16; *Literary Ethics*, I, 173.

[6] *Jour.* IX, 462; "Clubs," VII, 228.

[7] *C. E. C.* I, 62.

[8] *Poems*, IX, 83.

His use of pronouns is untainted by purism. The "and which" or "but which" error,[1] whereby a "which" clause or "who" clause is yoked in morganatic connection with an unpretending participle or adjective receives his unqualified sanction; and the "but I" for "but me," in phrases like "which have no watchman, or lover, or defender, but I,"[2] could not escape his patronage. The zealots for "It is I" will read with pain the following double-edged solecism in the "Journals": "he is me, and I am him."[3] If he disappoints us a little by the delicate exactness of some uses of "every,"[4] he manifests a consoling readiness to use the pronominal "either" of three, four, five, six, as many persons as you please.[5] Give him time — plenty of time — and he will even add to each a plural verb: "Each of these are free."[6] He clinches his emancipation from rule by the following couplet from "The Celestial Love":[7] —

> "There need no vows to bind
> Whom not each other seek, but find."

There is an unusual idiom of which he is curiously fond, "too" in correlation with "than." "The poet stands too high than that he should be a partisan.[8]" He uses "not but" pleonastically for "only": "they have not but 350 or less pages."[9] Once he even rises to the audacious "off of."[10]

The reader will bear in mind that these solecisms

[1] "Illusions," VI, 315; "Domestic Life," VII, 120; *C. E. C.* I, 11.
[2] *Jour.* VIII, 316; Cabot, I, 350.
[3] *Jour.* IV, 464.
[4] "Napoleon," IV, 227.
[5] "Experience," III, 55.
[6] *Jour.* IX, 162.
[7] *Poems*, IX, 117.
[8] *Jour.* IV, 199.
[9] *C. E. C.* I, 224.
[10] *Jour.* VIII, 300.

occur *rari natantes* in the text, and that an aggregation like the foregoing unduly magnifies their importance. They point significantly, however, to Emerson's native insensibility to linguistic or logical precision, a defect which his eminent rhetorical precision — the precision which sifts words and pares sentences — brings out in emphatic relief.

VI. Diction

In view of Emerson's predilection for the slang-like, — we mean for the homely, the brusque, the metaphorical, and the exaggerated, — his almost total avoidance of slang is an honor to his taste. He seldom admits it even in the company of that priceless antiseptic, the quotation mark. He hated vulgarity while he loved its concomitants.

Mr. Cabot and Professor Woodberry [1] tell us that he was indifferent to the French language and literature, but the frequency of French citations in the "Journals" and the rather noticeable sprinkling of French words in his English would support a quite contrary conjecture. He uses words or phrases like *politique, éclat, matériel, bonhomme, homme de lettres, soirée, aplomb, gai science, triste* (his adoption of that pinchbeck word is queer), *convives, naturel, à l'outrance, rencontre, aperçu, empressement, néant, contretemps, embarras de richesse, peu de cas, de rigueur, savoir vivre, savoir parler, chasseur, haute volée, jalouse, la portée, coup d'œil.* He dignifies his page with an occasional Latin phrase, or indulges his ear, more rarely, with some flute-like vocable from Italy.

[1] Cabot, I, 290; Woodberry, 85.

The single German word recorded in our notebook is *kleinstadlich*.

He has a relish for unfamiliar words, words of recent coinage or of his own make, or that closely similar type of words to which age has brought a second childhood. One regrets his countenance of new words ending in "ize" — a suffix which with its graceless kindred "ist," "ism," deserves to be paralleled with Attila and Alaric, Genseric and Rollo, and other captains of hordes of invading barbarians — or barbarisms, at the reader's pleasure. Emerson uses "Copernicize," "rhetoricize," "anthropize," "contemporize," and even, to the final overturn of one's nerves, "apathize." He does not shrink from "analogizing," as these examples prove, and ventures once upon "gigantizing." After this, "Birminghamize" will be a mere peccadillo, and a fondness for the prefix "dis," shown in "disentitle" and "disimagine," will unite with his partiality for "ize" to produce the impressive compound, "disindividualize." "Ize," of course, debouches into "ization," and we have "Africanization," which is pardonable, and "Jonathanization" (Americanization) which is "recommended to mercy." There are occasional Grecisms of heavy build, — "anthropometer," "dispathy," "lotophagous"; and there are Latin derivatives, sometimes a trifle plethoric, "circumlation," "omnivolence," "plenipotence," "pleniloquence," "enumerable," "miniminity," "necessitative," "consuetude," "exanimate," and "longanimity" (the last two not unusual in literature, of course, but curious and characteristic). Other Latinisms are of slenderer and more pleasing fabric,

"pudency" (dear to Emerson), "impressional," "routinary," "reverable," "aversation," "intensate," "edificant." One could spare "opprobriate" and "jeopardous," and "the tempers of angels" would be disturbed by "scribaceousness."

There is a class of homely improvisations which are sometimes attractive if the usage is solitary. "Selfism" is pedantic and "prigism" is cumbrous, but "fromness" is happily pictorial, and "otherest," in the sense of "most different," is a godsend. "Hasters" and "seemer" (one who seems) may be received with tempered gratitude, but "framable" is, or might be, useful, and "bugdom" and "flydom" are delectable inventions. To "ungod" is a term that throws one into consternation; it seems born of the Promethean Caucasus or of the Satanic (and Miltonic) Inferno.

Rarely a word is found of vulgar or flaunting connotations; "negrofine" is oleaginous, and "recentness" has the smartness and cheapness of fresh paint. The word "daguerred" (photographed) seems not so much up to date as in advance of date.

Emerson's position, in diction as in grammar, may be described as license invading scrupulosity, or, if one pleases, conscientiousness in the earliest stage of disintegration.

VII. Unbendings

That Emerson's language is a rare composite has been pretty well recognized since Lowell penned the coruscating sentence: "A diction at once so rich and so homely as his I know not where to match in these days

of writing by the page; it is like homespun cloth-of-gold." [1] It is doubtful, however, if the extent to which the *plebs* in vocabulary as distinguished from the *mob* penetrates the diction of Emerson has been yet realized by the critical public. The point will justify illustration.

A word is "plain" when it names an ordinary fact unpretendingly; it is "homely" when the fact or word has distinctly lost elegance; it is "familiar" when freely used by everyday mouths; it is "coarse" when it names unpleasant things, and, in the growth of this quality, it becomes "disgusting"; it is "brusque" when it becomes vigorous and unfeeling, and, when these qualities strengthen, it is called "rough"; it is "contemptuous" when the wish to degrade the object is strong; and when excitement is added to contempt, it becomes "violent." "Wheelbarrow" is a plain word; "kettle" is both plain and homely; "off and on" is familiar; "stomachache" is coarse; "vomit" is disgusting; "dunce" is brusque, and "blockhead" is "rough"; "snivelling" is contemptuous, and "damnable" is violent. It can be shown by examples that Emerson's diction displays all these attributes in turn; it would be folly and injustice to affirm that any of them is its staple or abiding characteristic.

The plainness may be illustrated from "Wealth." "Wealth begins in a tight roof that keeps the rain and wind out; in a good pump that yields plenty of sweet water; in two suits of clothes, so to change your dress when you are wet; in dry sticks to burn, in a good

[1] Lowell, *Prose Works*, I, 351.

double-wick lamp, and three meals." [1] When Emerson says that an Englishman must be served "with muffins, and not the promise of muffins"; [2] when he calls Brook Farm "an Age of Reason in a patty-pan"; [3] when he says that Homer and Milton may become tin pans; [4] when he tells us not to "fag in paltry works which serve our pot and bag alone"; [5] when he calls man's operations on the earth only a "little clipping, baking, patching, and washing," [6] he adds homeliness to plainness.

He is familiar, again, when he says that electricity would take a message "just as lief as not"; "would carry it in no time"; [7] when he says that people have to get "washed, clothed and set up on end"; [8] when he calls the English sailor "Jack" [9] and the Irish-American laborer "Paddy"; [10] when his self-reliant boy *farms it* and *teams it;* [11] when he declares that "life is a pitching of this penny — heads or tails." [12]

He is coarse (the word is used here without degrading implications) when, in "Worship," he repudiates "emotion and snuffle"; [13] when he talks of that "fatty face, pig-eye and squat-form"; [14] when he mentions animals that "sweat out" their "slimy house" and others that "perspire their bed"; [15] when he speaks of the "tape-worm of Europe"; [16] when he ends one paragraph with

[1] "Wealth," VI, 87.
[2] *English Traits*, V, 233.
[3] "Life and Letters in New England," X, 364.
[4] "Poetry and Imagination," VIII, 68.
[5] "Civilization," VII, 30.
[6] "Nature," I, 5.
[7] "Civilization," VII, 28.
[8] "Behavior," VI, 172.
[9] *English Traits*, V, 30.
[10] "Uses of Great Men," IV, 30.
[11] "Self-Reliance," II, 76.
[12] "Montaigne," IV, 149.
[13] "Worship," VI, 241.
[14] "Fate," VI, 11.
[15] "Fate," VI, 41.
[16] "Culture," VI, 145.

"dropsy" and begins the next with a "goitre";[1] when he talks of "snores and gastric noises";[2] when he adverts to the beggar "cracking fleas in the sunshine";[3] when he calls the Fugitive Slave ordinance "A filthy law."[4] He is disgusting — we do not say unjustifiably so, but yet disgusting — when he talks in a letter to Carlyle of "putrid black vomit."[5]

It should be remembered that Emerson in his sporadic use of coarse terms was guided by principle. He believed that all facts, including repulsive facts, were parts of the vocabulary furnished us by Nature, and that abstinence from these words would have deprived lice and fleas and tapeworms and gastric noises of one of their chief reasons for existence.

He is brusque or rough when he speaks, not unkindly, of "one of those tow-head boys";[6] when he calls the Normans at Hastings "Twenty thousand thieves," improved, shortly after, into "filthy thieves"; when he talks of two Englishmen pounding "each other to a poultice";[7] when he quotes his neighbor who puts his money "down his neck";[8] when, having declared, "you are trying to make that man another *you*," he adds tartly, "One's enough."[9]

He is contemptuous when he pictures men "writhing and roaring with rheumatism";[10] when he talks of spoiled children who "squeal and screech";[11] when he reviles

1 "Culture," VI, 134.
2 "Demonology," X, 26.
3 "Works and Days," VII, 166.
4 Cabot, II, 578.
5 *C. E. C.* II, 304.
6 "Civilization," VII, 21.
7 *English Traits*, V, 60–61; 78.
8 "Montaigne," IV, 153.
9 "Education," X, 138.
10 "Sovereignty of Ethics," X, 195.
11 "West India," XI, 118.

doctrines that would make the world "a greasy hotel" and men "a grimacing menagerie of monkeys and idiots"; [1] when he calls fine words "bilge-water" and describes the support granted to slavery as "snivelling"; [2] when he compares judges to idiots; [3] when he calls one type of old men "frowzy, timorous, peevish dotards"; [4] when he calls mesmerism "drivel" and "flatulency"; [5] when he speaks of certain doctrines as "the most swinish compost of mud and blood that was ever misnamed philosophy." [6]

For examples of violence we depend largely on the "Journals," which we have hitherto forborne to quote in this section, and due allowance must be made in all such references for the intimate nature of the record. Emerson speaks of bad verses that will "go to the devil"; [7] he admires, he even envies, the free use of imprecations; he quotes "damn" and its offspring with evident relish ("Damn George Washington," "Mankind is a damned rascal" [8]); he invents a hypothetic dialogue between Dickens and his publisher in which the publisher says, "Damn truth"; [9] he writes of the "filthy enactment," in words profane only for the stupid, "I will not obey it, by God." [10]

Emerson wanted words that reeked of things; he would not only have spoken daggers with Hamlet — he would have spoken chisels and harrows and bridges

[1] "Fugitive Slave Law," XI, 189.
[2] "Kansas," XI, 259–60.
[3] "John Brown," XI, 272.
[4] "Old Age," VII, 303.
[5] "Demonology," X, 26.
[6] "Michael Angelo," XII, 222.
[7] *Jour.* VIII, 176.
[8] "Uses of Great Men," IV, 27; "Montaigne," IV, 154.
[9] *Jour.* VI, 313.
[10] *Jour.* VIII, 236.

and cars. The distance between thing and word is usually felt to be narrowest in the plainest and coarsest objects; hence his fondness for that type of vocabulary.

VIII. Hyperbole

Another trait, congenial to the above and demanding a moment's attention, is Emerson's propensity to strain language, to strain even truth itself in the pursuit of energy.

The word "fury" is one of the powerful words in the language. To what does Emerson apply it? To the Dionysiac orgies and the Reign of Terror? Not at all. He applies it to the executive vigor of the English: "fury of life." [1] He applies it to artistic enthusiasm: Angelo's "furious chisel." [2] He applies it to the youth's craving for knowledge: "fury of curiosity and acquisition." [3] Even the wish to impart knowledge is a "fury." [4] Everything is pushed to an extreme. "The Times" inspires not apprehension, not fear, as it intelligibly might, but terror.[5] The English do not dislike or disapprove their neighbors; they hate them, French, Irish, Germans, with impartial vindictiveness.[6] The rhythm of Spenser, Chapman, Marlowe is a "tornado." [7] The effect of color on the eye is a "sting." [8] If a man thinks about himself — not the rarest of offences surely — he is not to be corrected or disliked,

[1] *English Traits*, v, 103.
[2] "Old Age," vii, 327.
[3] "Clubs," vii, 229.
[4] "Education," x, 149.
[5] *English Traits*, v, 267.
[6] *English Traits*, v, 122.
[7] "Poetry and Imagination," viii, 50.
[8] *E. in C.* 98.

he is to be hated "with a perfect hatred." [1] The "cries of prophets" would satisfy the normal demand for the picturesque; for Emerson they must "scream." [2] To attribute one devil to a conventionally prying woman might, it would seem, content a man who rebukes his fellows for the use of the superlative; Emerson furnishes her with a "platoon." [3] An enthusiast "drunk" with his belief is a pitiful anæmic creature; make him "desperately drunk" if you want consequences. [4] Will the reader find a word to stop the gap in the following sentence? "O Protean Nature, whose energy is change evermore, thou —— thyself into a berry or a drop." [5] In quiet moods, "distillest" or "infusest" or "conveyest" would probably suffice; if animation were wanted, he might say "flingest" or "castest." The word that actually fills this blank in Emerson is all but unbelievable; it is the word "hurlest." After this, when Emerson tells us that certain trees are "full of brandy," [6] we incline to think that certain traits in his style may be explicable by his association with these topers.

Meanwhile, he is pained if any one uses an excessive or violent expression. "Richter," he sighs, "is a perpetual exaggeration and I get nervous." [7]

The thoughtful critic cannot praise this intemperance; whether the license lay in word or idea, whether his thought outran the fact or his speech outran his thought, the objection, in either case, seems clear and

[1] *Jour.* VI, 337.
[2] *Jour.* VII, 111.
[3] *Jour.* VI, 390, 391.
[4] *Jour.* VII, 105.
[5] *Jour.* V, 562–63.
[6] *Jour.* VII, 298.
[7] *Jour.* VI, 283.

decisive. Let censors remember, however, that the practice is far from universal and that it is an outcome of Emerson's express tactics and policy in things intellectual. He gave each idea its "head," in the parlance of horsemanship, or its "fling," in the language of dissipation, relying on time and later experience to supply the needful corrective. The right and helpful word on this specialty of method is furnished us by the vigorous pen of Mr. J. J. Chapman: "Emerson's method is, not to give a generalization and trust to our making the allowance, but to give two conflicting statements and leave the balance of truth to be struck in our own minds on the facts. There is no inconsistency in this. It is a vivid and very legitimate mode of procedure." [1]

One point of discrimination must be added. Emerson's view is not that of the ordinary partialist or trafficker in superlatives. Three men may be discriminated: the man who makes reckless statements in good faith; the man who sees that reckless statements are partial, and, seeking universalism, becomes guarded; and the man who sees that guarded statements, likewise, are partial, and, seeking universalism in his turn, reverts to audacity. The third man was Emerson. His unqualified assertions were based on no conviction that the truth they proclaimed was absolute and final; but, seeing that *all* conceptions were provisional, he drew the curious but not indefensible inference that provisos were useless. Be generous to each thought in turn, and each thought in turn will be generous to you. Welcome the percep-

[1] J. J. Chapman, *Emerson and Other Essays*, 36–37.

tions as they come, and leave the audit and balance-sheet to time.

IX. Word-Play

Emerson loved words, not merely as symbols, arbitrary or natural, but as toys or castanets to jingle against each other. Sometimes the game takes the form of prose rhyme: "An orator is the thief of belief"; [1] thrifty trees "grow in spite of ice, lice, mice and borers." [2] Sometimes it is a linking of opposites: "this old Two-Face, creator-creature, mind-matter, right-wrong." [3] Again the same word is used in differing fashions or senses: "We owe to man man"; [4] "He carries ruins to ruins"; [5] "By drainage we went down to a subsoil we did not know, and have found there is a Concord under old Concord, which we are now getting the best crops from; a Middlesex under Middlesex." [6] In "Swedenborg" he describes the pervading spirit impressively as "earth-beat, sea-beat, heart-beat." [7] He addresses the "Poet" as "true land-lord! sea-lord! air-lord!" [8] Still more common and more subtly characteristic is his fashion of seeking form within form, nature within nature. The workers "have intercepted the sugar of the sugar, and the cotton of the cotton." [9] "Women carry sail, and men rudders. . . . The rudder of the rudder is not there" [10] (with the women). Europeans emigrate, but "the Eu-

[1] *Jour.* VII, 97.
[2] "Power," VI, 62.
[3] "Nominalist and Realist," III, 245.
[4] "Domestic Life," VII, 115.
[5] "Self-Reliance," II, 81.
[6] "Farming," VII, 150.
[7] "Swedenborg," IV, 141.
[8] "The Poet," III, 42.
[9] "Man the Reformer," I, 237.
[10] *Jour.* VIII, 175.

rope of Europe" [1] is left behind. Man "is the flood of the flood and the fire of the fire." [2] The artist is to give "the gloom of gloom and the sunshine of sunshine." [3]

This last group of cases denotes more than a whimsicality of language; they are linked to one of Emerson's profoundest feelings, the eternal sense, in Shakespearian phrase that "the greatest is behind," the reference of each object to a profounder and more inward object of which it is the shell and sign. He mentions this in "Representative Men" as a trait which Plato possessed and Shakespeare copied.[4]

X. Metaphor

Metaphor is the stronghold of Emerson, and, one is half moved to add, Emerson is the stronghold of metaphor. Minds as prolific and happy in the mere art or faculty have undoubtedly lived and written, but it is not clear that any other mind has united an equal skill in the practice of metaphor with so distinct a grasp of the depth of its insertion in the fabric of the universe. He had declared in the first of his published works [5] that the whole of nature is but a metaphor of the human mind, and the existence of things in many forms and on various planes, a fact of which metaphor is the expression, may be placed among the cornerstones of his philosophy. Metaphor was to him what Hebrew and Greek had been to early theologians; it was the dialect of revelation. The power of Swedenborg lay mainly in the fact

[1] *Jour.* VIII, 226.
[2] "Beauty," VI, 283.
[3] "Art," II, 351.
[4] "Plato," IV, 88.
[5] "Nature," I, 32.

that he had discerned its sacredness; the witchery of Shakespeare dwelt largely in his divination of its grace. It is only just to Emerson to add that he was equally sensitive to both appeals.

When Emerson says that skates are wings on the ice but fetters on the ground,[1] "that the air is coined into song," [2] that "a man is the façade of a temple wherein all wisdom and all good abide," [3] two things have plainly occurred in each example, — an escape and a reincarnation. The old literal form under which we viewed skates, air, or man has been summarily thrust aside, and yet this disenthralment has been accompanied by a reappearance in another form, equally clear-cut and agreeable to the imagination. This new concreteness is not a new enclosure, because it is obviously impossible for us to conceive skates as wings or air as coin or man as a church front for any length of time. Now it is the union in metaphor of the two things indispensable to a mind like Emerson's — *liberation* and *embodiment* — that make him throughout life its worshipper and servant. His thought demanded a habitation, yet rejected permanence in its habitation; the *tent* that met both needs was metaphor.

The sureness, felicity, and vigor of this faculty in Emerson has made criticism unanimous in its praise. Its range may be readily conceived. We have seen how the diction — and the thought, of course, likewise — embraced a wide compass of plain, homely, and repulsive facts and names. Conceive an imagination in which

[1] "Fate," VI, 15.
[2] "Love," II, 176.
[3] "The Over-Soul," II, 270–71.

kings and planets are as much at home as cobwebs and beggars, and the range of comparison will become obvious. In his double and equal love of rude plainness and prodigal magnificence, and in his power to derive metaphor from both, Emerson was a true scion or apt scholar of the Elizabethans.

XI. Epigram

The above exposition has shown that Emerson loved to shake off hampering qualifications and to carry his thought to pointed and pungent extremes, that he loved the play and click of words, that his gift in metaphor was transcendent. A little reflection will show that the traits so named are the equipment — the exact, and almost the entire, equipment — of the maker of epigrams.

An epigram resembles a dart in the force of its discharge, in the slenderness of its frame, and the sharpness of its point. The peculiarities in Emerson's epigrams are that, though short, they are solid; that they are launched with vigor, but launched, as it were, in mid-air; that they pierce but rarely sting; that they are almost invariably imbedded in dense paragraphs; that they represent degrees of sincerity and seriousness to which this modish and mocking instrument is by no means thoroughly habituated.

An epigram represents the intensification of the moment in literature; it is fitting, therefore, that it should be the peculiar instrument of a man to whom the intensification of the moment was the import of life.

XII. Condensation

Emerson is a condensed writer; that fact has penetrated the grade schools, almost the hotel lobbies; and his condensation is rightly associated with his epigram. It would, nevertheless, be a grave error to conclude that the rate of condensation apparent in the epigrams is carried out in the essays. Emerson packs truth into a pregnant sentence; in the next sentence the packing is quite as expert, but the second truth is identical with the first. "Every great man is a unique. The Scipionism of Scipio is precisely that part he could not borrow. Shakespeare will never be made by the study of Shakespeare." [1] The first sentence is of rare compactness. The second and third sentences are highly condensed, but they condense the *previous thought*. At the end of the first sentence, the ratio of thoughts to words is one to six; at the end of the passage, it is one to twenty-eight.

The truth is that by the test of diction Emerson is a chary writer; by the test of images he is prodigal; and both factors must be weighed in any just estimate of his effective condensation. The percentage of thought is highly variable. The long essay on "History" contains, in effect, but two thoughts, that innumerable forms repeat one message and that man is the doublet of the universe. The little essay on "Art" contains six or seven major propositions. The number of separable and considerable thoughts in an essay varies possibly from two to fifteen. The average of main thoughts to the cubic

[1] "Self-Reliance," II, 83.

yard, so to speak, might be rudely conjectured to be twice as great as in Carlyle and Matthew Arnold — a very substantial and honorable superiority, it must be conceded, but far below what might be inferred from the comparison of Emerson with the two last named writers, sentence for sentence. The "Essays" do not even approach in compactness the "Maximes" of La Rochefoucauld or the "Pensées" of Joubert.

XIII. Floridity

Emerson's fondness for ornament was incontestable, and his schooling in this particular had been unlucky. Boston oratory was not always sparing or sober in decoration, and the virtues and even the asceticisms of Aunt Mary did not protect her from the composition of paragraphs in a taste that was Venetian, not to say barbaric. Emerson's early "Journals" betray this tutelage, and passages in his published works suggest that this was a matter in which he never quite outlived adolescence. "In youth," he says, "we clothe ourselves with rainbows and go as brave as the zodiac";[1] a passage which is meant to glorify youthful idealism, but which might aptly be regarded as a critique — and, in some sort, as an illustration — of the vices of youthful style.

The quantity of this matter in Emerson is small — far less probably than one per cent of his entire output. It is not, however, wholly unimportant, for — if appearances may be trusted — it has lost to Emerson's prose the approbation of an able and influential critic.

[1] "Fate," VI, 41.

Matthew Arnold's inference, indeed, is strikingly unfair. He quotes two sentences which he thinks bad, quotes them as he admits, in their unrevised and more offensive form, and declares such writing to be "almost impossible to a born man of letters." [1] Now, in the first place, the emphasis on the term "man of letters" is strategic, though the strategy may be undesigned. It suggests exclusions which the terms author and writer would not permit. It is redolent of the *cabinet;* it exhales a sense of official, clerkly, dexterous, disciplined, chastened, circumspect abilities. Arnold is right in withholding this praise from Emerson; but if a great writer be defined as one in whom expression coöperates powerfully with thought, Emerson's claims are mighty. The condemnation of Carlyle by Arnold on like grounds in the same passage amounts almost to an acquittal for Emerson.

The offending passage should be quoted: "Every soul is a celestial being to every other soul. The heart has its sabbaths and jubilees, in which the world appears as a hymeneal feast, and all natural sounds and the circle of the seasons are erotic odes and dances." [2] This passage is *gelatinous:* that word sums up its modest guilt. Does it really cut off its perpetrator from all hope of eminence in style? Has any one drawn up a schedule of the things of which great men of letters are incapable? Would great men of letters, would Shakespeare, would Milton, would Matthew Arnold, be thankful for the promulgation of such a schedule? Does the thing exist

[1] Arnold, *Discourses in America,* 159–68.
[2] Quoted in Arnold, *Discourses in America,* 160.

of which great men of letters are incapable? The worst of almost any great man in almost any field might seem to make his best impossible.

The friend of Emerson might be tolerant of certain retrenchments. He may feel that he should be content if Emerson would say "thou" rather less and "'t is" not at all; if he forbore to write "thanks evermore" to Carlyle, and "all your loveliness," meaning all your lovely conduct, to Dr. Furness;[1] if he discountenanced the word "blushing" ("blushing emotion," "blushing boys");[2] if he stood out against saying that a wise man is "frankincense and flowers" and that action is "pearls and rubies to his discourse";[3] if he would picture a benefactor under a form less resplendent than "a shower of falling stars";[4] if he would be a trifle less free with "kings" who make his essays like the antechamber of Napoleon; if he were less anxious to have people "perfumed . . . with hope and power."[5] But these cavils are a little captious where the faults are sporadic only; and where generous amends are made from time to time by the proffer of passages in the ornate style where loftiness and beauty rule unchallenged. We have only to cite the conclusion of "Spiritual Laws," the opening of the second "Nature," and the splendid initial passage of the famous "Address."

[1] Furness, *Letters*, 48.
[2] "Character," III, 105; "Domestic Life," VII, 119.
[3] "Politics," III, 216; "The American Scholar," I, 95.
[4] "Domestic Life," VII, 129.
[5] "Circles," II, 319.

XIV. Rhythm

The merit of prose rhythm is rarely ascribed to Emerson, yet it seems to us that his faculty of rhythm within the sentence was notable and that even in files of sentences progression and perspective are distinctly to be seen. What passage ever orbed itself into grander circuits than the passage beginning "There are days which occur in this climate" in the induction of the second "Nature"? [1]

To appreciate the prose rhythm of Emerson, two facts must be diligently remembered: that the *arc* of vibration is often narrow, and that the *rate* of vibration is often slow. Take the following sentence from "Fate": "Things ripen, new men come." [2] The effect, in rapid and continuous reading, is brusque and angular. But make the pauses needful for balance, read "Things || ripen: || new men || come"; and the ear is gratified by the compact but stately undulations. Perhaps the most remarkable instance of the kind is found in "Clubs": "We know beforehand that yonder man must think as we do. Has he not hands, — two feet, — hair and nails? Does he not eat, — bleed, — laugh, — cry?" [3] Read swiftly, the passage is a series of jolts; read gravely, slowly, with due recognition of commas and dashes, its rhythm is unmistakable. The minuet must not be danced to the tune of the jig.

In the fitting of sentence to sentence in the texture of paragraphs, the range of merit is considerable. Research or good fortune will light upon passages the

[1] "Nature," III, 169. [2] "Fate," VI, 39. [3] "Clubs," VII, 234.

beauty of which, in this particular, is ideal. Take the following from "English Traits":[1] —

"The hopes of the commoners take the same direction with the interest of the patricians. Every man who becomes rich buys land and does what he can to fortify the nobility, into which he hopes to rise. The Anglican clergy are identified with the aristocracy. Time and law have made the joining and moulding perfect in every part. The cathedrals, the Universities, the national music, the popular romances, conspire to uphold the heraldry which the current politics of the day are sapping. The taste of the people is conservative. They are proud of the castles, and of the language and symbol of chivalry. Even the word *lord* is the luckiest style that is used in any language to designate a patrician. The superior education and manners of the nobles recommend them to the country."

Let us now listen to Emerson at his worst (the passage is taken from the second essay on "Art"):[2] —

"The first and last lesson of the useful arts is that Nature tyrannizes over our works. They must be conformed to her law, or they will be ground to powder by her omnipresent activity. Nothing droll, nothing whimsical will endure. Nature is ever interfering with Art. You cannot build your house or pagoda as you will, but as you must. There is a quick bound set to your caprice. The leaning tower can only lean so far. The veranda or pagoda can curve upward only to a certain point. The slope of your roof is determined by the weight of snow."

[1] *English Traits*, v, 173, 174.

[2] "Art," vii, 41.

For a passage classified as "worst," the above citation must be acknowledged to be surprisingly respectable. It may be said to exhibit an indecisive struggle between a true feeling for rhythm and a strong propensity toward curtness. The centre of interest is the fact that just as there is a paragraph-logic in Emerson which the mob — even the "mob of gentlemen who write with ease" — are dilatory in acknowledging, so likewise is there a paragraph-rhythm, perceptible even in the most luckless moments, and capable, in favored hours, of mounting to perfection. The theory that Emerson, to mind and ear, is a bare handful of particles has proved its right to an honorable interment: "dust to dust."

In conclusion, a detail, interesting but hardly important, may be adverted to. Emerson's ear seems not to have partaken of the repulsion commonly felt by sensitive ears for the close proximity of similar sounds. Some odd cacophonies result. "We left the train at Salisbury and took a carriage to Amesbury." [1] "This vanguard of civility and power they coldly hold." [2] "If the race is good, so is the place." [3] "In the silence of tradition this one relation to science," [4] etc. "The planet itself splits his stick." [5] "And to these, their ends, all things continually ascend." [6] "Can you bottle the efflux of a June noon?" [7] "The sphinxes scorn dunces." [8] "We will give up our coaches, and wine, and watches." [9] The trait is too scattered to be influential in his prose; but its extension to his verse was unlucky.

[1] *English Traits*, v, 276.
[2] *English Traits*, v, 101.
[3] *English Traits*, v, 77.
[4] *English Traits*, v, 281.
[5] "Civilization," vii, 27.
[6] "Uses of Great Men," iv, 11.
[7] "Country Life," xii, 157.
[8] *Jour.* x, 408.
[9] "Fugitive Slave Law," xi, 209.

XV. Polarity

All careful and able writing tends in two directions, inclines to one or other of two opposite poles. On the one hand, literature and extended and meditated speech are social functions; as such, they are subject to the social regulations which enjoin decency, politeness, order, consistency, moderation. On the other hand, they reflect the universe, and, as reflectors, they tend to reproduce the variety, the intensity, the barbarity, and the extravagance which the universe not seldom discloses. On one side, the occasion, the setting, refines and assimilates the crude facts, imparting to all the good-breeding, the suavity, and the uniformity of the parlance of the drawing-room. On the other, the strong fact, with its two servitors, passion and imagination, tends always to the narrowing of the interval between word and thing, to the identification of literature with the life it copies, and the consequent development of vividness and diversity. Let us call the first of these tendencies, style (not forgetting that the word has other values), and the second, expression or expressiveness. They oppose each other, or, rather, each opposes the other's extreme; style tends to dyke in or embank expression: expression tends to overflow and submerge style. The victory of style gives us authors like Montaigne, La Bruyère, Goethe (in his prose), Addison, Swift, Gibbon, Scott, Jane Austen, Macaulay, and Hawthorne: the victory of expression produces writers like Milton (in his prose), Sterne, Hugo, De Quincey, Lamb, Dickens, Thackeray, and Carlyle.

The situation of Emerson between these antagonisms is a little odd, but is capable of clear-cut definition. He represents expression on an academic basis; or, to be more explicit, a style based on the norm trying to convert itself into a style based on the variation, and only half carrying out the wheel or swinging movement by which this change in basis was to be effected.

XVI. Style

The grave, sedate lad, whom the elders in sober and devout Boston approved, reproduced in his earlier compositions the academic ideals which consorted with his habitat, his ancestry, his destined calling, and with one phase at least of his diverse and as yet uncharted temperament. The tone is restrained, deliberate, clerical. The following passage, written at twenty-nine, at the close of his brief pastorate, may be cited as an example: "What I revere and obey in it is its reality, its boundless charity, its deep interior life, the rest it gives to mind, the echo it returns to my thoughts, the perfect accord it makes with my reason through all its representation of God and His Providence; and the persuasion and courage that come out thence to lead me upward and onward. Freedom is the essence of this faith. It has for its object simply to make men good and wise. Its institutions then should be as flexible as the wants of men. That form out of which the life and suitableness have departed should be as worthless in its eyes as the dead leaves that are falling around us." [1]

Nobody could launch a bomb-shell more sedately.

[1] "The Lord's Supper," xi, 21

This demure voice was, moreover, the voice of the real Emerson, or, rather, of one real Emerson; for there sprang from these chastened loins another Emerson, a lusty and sinewy manchild, of imperious and various exigency, who never quite matured and who rather perplexed and troubled than definitely shook off the mild paternal discipline. The style became checkered with moods and phases in ample variety, which seem often to prophesy its evolution into a form in which expressiveness is dominant: but the evolution is arrested, the prediction is but half fulfilled. Some illustrations of these moods will show the degree to which a style may become versatile without gaining — in the strict sense — fluidity or suppleness. (The list of moods or phrases is not exhaustive.)

a. Plainness and pith. "Beasts, fire, water, stones, and corn serve him. The field is at once his floor, his work-yard, his garden, and his bed. . . . The private poor man hath cities, ships, canals, bridges, built for him. . . . He sets his house upon the road, and the human race go forth every morning, and shovel out the snow, and cut a path for him." [1]

b. Powerful assertiveness. "They believe that mustard bites the tongue, that pepper is hot, friction-matches incendiary, revolvers are to be avoided, and suspenders hold up pantaloons." [2] "Let him not quit his belief that a popgun is a popgun, though the ancient and honorable of the earth affirm it to be the crack of doom." [3]

[1] "Nature," I, 13–14.
[2] "Montaigne," IV, 153.
[3] "The American Scholar," I, 102.

c. Tingling, elastic buoyancy. "I seem to partake its rapid transformations; the active enchantment reaches my dust, and I dilate and conspire with the morning wind." [1]

d. Exhilaration in rough strength or ferocity. "These Norsemen are excellent persons in the main, with good sense, steadiness, wise speech and prompt action. But they have a singular turn for homicide; their chief end of man is to murder or be murdered. The sight of a tent-cord or a cloak-string puts them on hanging somebody, a wife, or a husband, or, best of all, a king. If a farmer has so much as a hay-fork, he sticks it into a King Dag." [2]

e. High and frosty aloofness. "Say to them, 'O father, O mother, O wife, O brother, O friend, I have lived with you after appearances hitherto. Henceforward I am the truth's. Be it known unto you that henceforward I obey no law less than the eternal law. I will have no covenants but proximities.'" [3]

f. Truculence. "Then again, do not tell me, as a good man did to-day, of my obligation to put all poor men in good situations. Are they *my* poor? I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong.'" [4]

g. Apocalyptic wrath. "Nobody doubts that Daniel Webster could make a good speech. Nobody doubts that there were good and plausible things to be said on the part of the South. But this is not a question of

[1] "Nature," I, 17.
[2] *English Traits*, V, 58–59.
[3] "Self-Reliance," II, 72–73.
[4] "Self-Reliance," II, 52.

ingenuity, not a question of syllogisms, but of sides. *How came he there?*" [1]

h. Youthful passion. See familiar passages in "Love," *Works*, II, 173–78.

i. Love. "He is mine. I am my brother and my brother is me. If I feel overshadowed and outdone by great neighbors, I can yet love." [2]

j. Benignant irony — gentle satire of the humanitarians. "The ox must be taken from the plough and the horse from the cart, the hundred acres of the farm must be spaded, and the man must walk wherever boats and locomotives will not carry him. Even the insect world was to be defended, — that had been too long neglected, and a society for the protection of ground-worms, slugs, and mosquitos was to be incorporated without delay." [3]

k. Benignant irony plus intimate tenderness. "All day, between his three or four sleeps, he coos like a pigeon-house, sputters and spurs and puts on his faces of importance: and when he fasts, the little Pharisee fails not to sound his trumpet before him." [4]

l. Romanticized courtliness. Read the entire "wood-god" passage in "Character," *Works*, III, 105–07.

m. Heroic exaltation. "And yet the love that will be annihilated sooner than treacherous has already made death impossible, and affirms itself no mortal but a native of the deeps of absolute and inextinguishable being." [5]

[1] "Fugitive Slave Law," (II) XI, 225. [2] "Compensation," II, 124.
[3] "New England Reformers," III, 252, 253.
[4] "Domestic Life," VII, 104. [5] "Heroism," II, 264.

n. Beatitude. "Ineffable is the union of man and God in every act of the soul. The simplest person who in his integrity worships God, becomes God; yet for ever and ever the influx of this better and universal self is new and unsearchable." [1]

The expense of space which the above citations have imposed has not been profitless. They bring out, as general phrases or insulated examples could not do, the extent to which Emerson's mature style became parti-colored, sensitive, and variable; and they edge the surprise with which one finally discovers that, after all this eclecticism and abandonment, it remains, in virtue and effect, an academic style. The sallies of temperament are many and diverse, impetuous sometimes, and energetic; the style seems ready to take on the mobile expressiveness of Carlyle's or Thackeray's: yet, at the end of the essay, one feels that a grave person has uttered a sedate discourse. The ice cracks and loosens, but hardly thaws; or, to vary the figure, the waves dance and ripple certainly, but they dance and ripple, not in the open sea, but in the clefts of the hillside. The point of dramatic and psychological significance in Emerson's style is the effort of temperament — never wholly successful but never quite unsuccessful — to throw off the shackles of discipline.

XVII. Inhibitions

Emerson aspired toward two traits or qualities of style, the intense and the organic. To multiply significance, to charge words with the quality of things, to

[1] "The Over-Soul," II, 292.

reach ultimata, finalities, in expression — this was the aim. Out of this ambition rise his leading traits, merits and defects, the intrepid metaphor, the flashing epigram, the unchained hyperbole, the approach, both in homely and in florid language, to the outmost confines of good taste, the annulment of verbiage, the pursuit of condensation. But beyond this power to coruscate and crepitate with meaning, he saw another primal virtue in language, the virtue that made it organic or constitutional, the free and native outflow of the personality. Emerson's search for the first of these virtues made him only half successful in the attainment of the second.

The writings of Emerson show an unlimited and uninterrupted vivacity. In that respect they do not fully represent his temper: more precisely, they represent one half of his temper to the exclusion of the other half. While the intellectual energy of the man Emerson was remarkable, it was mixed with a great deal that was placid, self-tolerant, and easy-going. He could spare himself; he could loiter and stroll; in his Cambridge invalid days, he could shut up his books in a cloudy July noon, put on his old clothes and old hat, and slink away to the whortleberry bushes.[1] One sometimes wonders if it would not have been wholesome for his literary style to put on its old clothes, occasionally, and pick whortleberries. It never dreamed of such descents.

Part of Emerson's alertness, therefore, represents spontaneity, and part, the man's pressure on himself. The crack of the self-applied whip is audible in the sentences.

[1] Cabot, I, 137.

but in the life, but of that life the prose works must be viewed as the attestations rather than the specimens. Destiny refuses the intimate craving even of her best beloved. Emerson's longing was to be swept away by a mastering inspiration, a Pentecostal wind: instead he composes literature even in his "Journals," and makes two drafts of letters to his private friends.

XVIII. Conclusion

The desire of explicitness and precision has resulted probably in an over-emphasis on the restrictions handled in the foregoing section. At most and at worst, they merely limit, in a noticeable degree, the adaptation of Emerson's prose to continuous perusal. A certain tension and constraint, a sense that things are rather conveyed than imparted, rather brought to us than given, mixes an element of discomfort with the enjoyment and stimulus which are vested in perpetuity, so to speak, in the inestimable prose of Emerson. The Alpine traveller is subject to inconveniences which do not trouble the wayfarer in the quiet plains: he has also his marvellous compensations.

Emerson fails to achieve perspective in his essays, to give to three or four main ideas the distinction which is secured by the use of many secondary thoughts in the form of pedestals or substructures. But no man is more likely to flash out in the process of a discourse three or four phrases which would stamp both idea and phrase in lasting solidarity on the reader's mind, and it is doubtful if anything more than this is effected by the most masterly exhibitions of perspective.

But continuous reading represents only one section — perhaps a small section — of the influence of a thoughtful, and, more especially, of a sententious, writer. It may be a question if the wedge by which Emerson pierces and shall pierce the indifference of mankind is not found in the sentence rather than the essay. It is the sentence that embodies the point, and it is the point that penetrates. It is the vital phrase in its isolated reappearance in the reader's brooding memory, in its quotation on the alien page — in neither of which contexts is it likely to suffer the drawback of a too resplendent setting — that may be most effective in prolonging and diffusing the influence of Emerson. Nor can one readily name the man better fitted to beget sentences which shall have careers in their own right, more expert in lending to the great and memorable in thought the support of the unforgettable in phrase. It is curious to note, in conclusion, that while the larger units of his work must be criticised, as, up to a certain point, unhandy or unbusinesslike, the individual phrases are as adroit and tactical as they are lofty and felicitous; they are made to be grasped, to be repeated, to be remembered; the fame of their producer as a master of language could be safely trusted to their influence alone.

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CHAPTER VI

EMERSON AS POET

I. Controversy

The history of critical opinion, in the fields of Emerson's prose and verse, has been singularly different. The world made up its mind, hastily and all but unanimously, on the subject of the prose. Various half-true or untrue assumptions, including the assumption that knowledge on the subject was complete, passed contentedly from mind to mind, and enough of error is current even to-day to afford scope for alteration and readjustment. The verse, on the other hand, has provoked a fairly keen and brisk controversy, and, as debate sharpens perception, the main qualities of the poems have been definitely ascertained, without any abatement in the warmth of the contention. On the nature of his poetic traits, on the classification of those traits as bad or good, men are pretty well agreed. The passages which transport the believers are enjoyed by the sceptics; the faults which the assailants detest are painful to the defenders. The difference is resolvable into a shift of stress, and rests at last on those organic peculiarities in critics which argument is slow to discern and powerless to reconcile.

That minds keenly sensitive to logic and coherence and less vividly responsive to outleaps of inspiration, minds like Mr. (since Lord) John Morley and Mr. W. C.

Brownell, should be unfavorable to Emerson's verse is an outgrowth of the nature of things for which neither Mr. Morley nor Mr. Brownell — nor even Emerson — should be hastily or harshly blamed. The nature of things seems equally and more genially manifest in the value set upon these poems by men like E. C. Stedman and Professor Woodberry in whom the instinct for pure poetry is conspicuous. But the negative of the first two critics hardly possesses the same weight as the affirmations of the last-named judges. It is easier to conceive that two accomplished prospectors like Mr. Morley and Mr. Brownell should have missed the discovery of "paying ore" in the deep-laid strata of a rugged country than that two expert mineralogists like E. C. Stedman and Professor Woodberry should have been hoodwinked into the taking of iron pyrites for gold. Even the sceptics do not deny the existence of "traces" of the authentic metal: they protest merely that the percentage is unremunerative.

The truth seems to be that there is at one extreme of Emerson's work a small area about whose incorrigible badness all men are pretty well agreed; that at the other extreme is another small area which unifies all suffrages in commendation of its excellence; that between these extremes lies a much larger area of less decided quality which the hostile critics affiliate with the first of these extremes, the admirers, contrariwise, with the second. This semi-neutral mass — this middle-class element which, among gentlefolk, passes for gentle, but which, in the company of the mob, might be reckoned as *canaille* — exists perhaps to a greater extent than we

imagine even in poets of incontestable eminence, like Keats, Shelley, and Tennyson. In Emerson the bulk of the indecisive material is comparatively large, and the attitude of the critic toward it will determine whether Emerson as poet is counted by that critic among the prophets shot with ineptitudes or the bunglers visited with inspirations.

II. Technique

There can be no question as to the frequent and flagrant badness of Emerson's versification. If it were less questionable — if, for instance, it could be discovered with a qualm of horror or a thrill of triumph — its effect on the reader might be more injurious. When David Copperfield, at Salem House, was obliged to wear the contumelious placard "Take care of him. He bites," he was saved from all embarrassment in meeting his schoolfellows by Tommy Traddles who presented him punctually to each comer with the inspiriting formula, "Look here! Here's a game." The very obviousness and hopelessness of Emerson's versification in certain places renders him the same service which the friendly advertisement of Traddles performed for the unlucky David. A substantial amelioration ensues, when a fault bad enough to be really serious is aggravated to the point of becoming really comic. We say, in amused leniency, "Look here! Here's a game."

Moreover, a fault in prosody, however serious, is after all a finite, a tangible, to some extent a separable and manageable thing. It *deducts*, but it need not permanently *derange* or distress; its effect is like that of a

number of jolts, occurring, we will say, at intervals of ten minutes, in the course of a drive through a romantic country in a dreamy afternoon. The discomfort is real enough, but it rather interrupts than disenchants. Emerson's rhymes are often pitiable: one begins by indignation at such couplings as *nature, feature; forms, worms; hurry, busy; swamp, lamp; realm, film; grace, praise; own, down; coats, spots; alive, give.* But, before he has done with us, he contrives to extenuate or efface all these transgressions by such further iniquities as: *thoughts, doubts; god, cloud; hour, slower; power, restore; arms, psalms; likeness, sickness; science, clairvoyance; doeth, knoweth; pronounce, persuasions; Italian, Castilian; generous, rose; draw, proprietor.*

All this looks very serious, but the amount of bad rhyme that verse, otherwise strong, will float is something that it has not entered into the heart of uncritical or unobservant readers to conceive. It may be doubted whether the best singers are the most precise rhymesters, the perfection of music commonly implying a speed and impulsiveness in the movement which refuses to stop its course or cool its fervor in any higgling concern for the niceties of consonance. The question of rhythm is grave, and Emerson's faults in this regard, though less frequent, are more troublesome. He can write lines that pierce the ear like gimlets: —

"To a beauty that not fades." [1]

"And the friend not hesitates." [2]

To find a parallel to these acuminate "t's," we should

[1] *Poems*, IX, 174.

[2] *Poems*, IX, 80.

have to recur to the author of "The Scholar-Gipsy" (a disparager of Emerson's poetic claims) in lines like

"Ah! do not we, wanderer! await it too?" [1]

or like the third line with its italicized pronoun in the following quatrain: —

"What poets feel not, when they make,
A pleasure in creating,
The world, in *its* turn, will not take
Pleasure in contemplating." [2]

One turns from this to Emerson, as Lear turned back to Goneril from Regan.

The American poet, again, will omit a syllable in a place where its absence deranges an entire line in a critical passage: —

"Built in an age, the mad wind's night work." [3]

To equal this, recourse must be had to a mulcted pentameter in one of the most impressive lyrics of the author of "Prometheus Unbound": —

"Fresh spring, and summer, and winter hoar."

Again, to find an appropriate dust-heap on which to cast so dissonant a combination of vowels as

"Of thine eye I am eyebeam," [4]

one would have to revert to the love-sonnets of a certain subject of Queen Elizabeth who added the following line to the museum of literary curiosities: —

"For as you were when first your eye I eyed." [5]

[1] Arnold, *Poetical Works*, "The Scholar-Gipsy," 279.
[2] Arnold, *Poetical Works*, "A Caution to Poets," 243.
[3] *Poems*, IX, 42.
[4] *Poems*, IX, 24.
[5] Shakespeare, Sonnet CIV.

It is with the prosody of the great poets as with the English of the great writers as a class; they do not so much avoid blunders as the appearance, the manner, of blundering. They have the license and the aplomb of aristocrats: in the commission of offences which would disgrace a *bourgeois*, their bearing is irreproachable. This coolness and balance was not shared by Emerson. His poetry is *unassured*, and when he blunders, his verses have a telltale air of being caught in the act. We do not mean that he was necessarily ashamed of these transgressions: on the contrary, he often gives the impression of imposing these errors on himself as a high æsthetic penance, or recondite thank-offering to some divine protector of plainness and sincerity in speech. The point is that Emerson, unlike most of his fellow-culprits, not only sins but confesses; and the confession has a double effect in disarming censure at the same time that it emphasizes the fault.

III. Coherence

More serious than these deficiencies in technique is the structural laxity of a great number of the poems. What Lowell said of Emerson's criticism of verse, that "while no man is so sensitive to what is poetical, few men are less sensible than he of what makes a poem,"[1] applies with equal force to his constructive work in poetry. Emerson did not habitually conceive life in those blocks or units to which poems are complemental. His typical — not his universal — principle of cement was a law or abstraction supported by concrete ex-

[1] Lowell, *Prose Works*, I, 354.

amples, normally brief and often fairly numerous. Now it is clear that if you have this kind of matter to submit, you may do various things: you may present the law by itself, or in the company of one or two or ten or fifty illustrations, the only limits to the number of illustrations being fixed by the fertility of your own imagination and the opulence of nature. It is obvious that there is nothing self-limiting, and, therefore, nothing organic, in such a method.

So strong is Emerson's propensity in this direction that even in a poem of ten lines one is conscious of that peculiar combination of incompleteness and redundance which is characteristic of the method. The following is called "Heroism":[1]—

> "Ruby wine is drunk by knaves,
> Sugar spends to fatten slaves,
> Rose and vine-leaf deck buffoons;
> Thunder-clouds are Jove's festoons,
> Drooping oft in wreaths of dread,
> Lightning-knotted round his head;
> The hero is not fed on sweets,
> Daily his own heart he eats;
> Chambers of the great are jails,
> And head-winds right for royal sails."

On this poem two questions might be put to the author with equal propriety: Why not half as many specifications? and Why not twice as many? and both questions are unanswerable. One says with Touchstone: "I'll rhyme you so eight years together." The single poem becomes a kind of anthology and shares with the anthology an indefinite latitude both of excision and of augmentation.

[1] *Poems*, IX, 272.

Poetry of this kind may evince an authentic inspiration, as the verses on "Heroism" unquestionably do, but inspiration is no more organic completeness than breath — a Saxon synonym for the idea — is body. Even "May-Day," where the "trembling ecstasy" is surely at its acme, is defenceless against Arnold's pointed remark that it consists of a series of observations.[1] So inveterate is the bent toward discursiveness that even when Emerson has, in a fashion, written a poem, as in the "Threnody," he will half unwrite it by adding, without break, under the same title, the outcome of a later period and altered mood.

Some points in Emerson's versification are the normal expression of these tendencies. It is natural that a thought of indeterminate extension should express itself in spreading, ungirt stanzas like those of "May-Day," "To Rhea," "Wood-Notes," and "Monadnoc." It is natural, again, that an order whose basis is parallelism should find embodiment in uniform metres like blank verse or the octosyllabic couplet in which groups of like thoughts can be readily sheaved or fagoted.

The lack of organic unity is no surprise to those who have penetrated the nature of Emerson. His method is not the usual artistic method of conquest by instalments; it consists in the immediate capture, and the continuous recapture, of the whole. His poetry, like his life, was, in theory at least, a succession — not properly a series — of glorified, self-inwrapt, and self-sufficing moments.

[1] Arnold, *Discourses in America*, 157.

IV. Parable

The form which thought assumes in Emerson's prose — that of law or abstraction plus an unfixed number of concrete embodiments — has clearly some hardships or exigencies for the imagination. The law as such is imponderable; the concrete images are rapid and fragmentary: the alternative is want of substance or want of anchorage. It resembles a whirlpool or vortex in which a centre that is hollow is the attracting and controlling point of a whirl of objects which become half illusory through their lustre, their variety, and the swiftness of their rotation. Does not a prose with this basis call imperatively for a certain kind of poetry as its natural correlate and corrective? Beside this hurried flutter of many fugitive, diminished, and in some degree obscured appearances, was there not a place for a single, enlarged, abiding, and clarified image? If his prose gave us his "Sermon on the Mount," would not his poetry serve a useful end as the receptacle and organ of his parables?

Emerson had an aim of this sort in view in a large section of his verse and, on one occasion, he proved beyond question that he was capable of succeeding in this endeavor. That success was the poem "Days." [1] Here all conditions meet, apt parable, interesting story, picture, drama, vivid culmination, compression into eleven beautiful lines.

Very different from this is the usual outcome. The following may serve as an illustration: [2] —

[1] *Poems*, ix, 228.

[2] *Poems*, ix, 170.

"Heat with viewless fingers moulds,
Swells, and mellows, and matures,
Paints, and flavors, and allures,
Bird and brier inly warms,
Still enriches and transforms,
Gives the reed and lily length,
Adds to oak and oxen strength, . . .
What god is this imperial Heat,
Earth's prime secret, sculpture's seat?
Doth it bear hidden in its heart
Water-line patterns of all art?
Is it Dædalus? is it Love?
Or walks in mask almighty Jove,
And drops from Power's redundant horn
All seeds of beauty to be born?"

Three comments may be made on this passage. First, there is no story or anecdote. Second, the bewildering multiplicity and fugaciousness from which we sought escape in the simplicity of parable has followed us into our city of refuge. Third, for the abstraction, heat, to which daily and scientific usage had habituated us and which had become intelligible even if it remained unimaginable, a personification of an evasive and perfunctory kind has been substituted. The lifeless impersonation appears frequently under many names. Sometimes it is Rhea, sometimes the World-Soul, sometimes (with slightly quickened animation) the Sphinx or the pine-tree, sometimes Saadi and again Merlin; and once it is Guy.

Mr. John Morley (in the days when he was Mr. John Morley) noted shrewdly that Emerson's poems were "too naked, unrelated, and cosmic; too little clad with the vestures of human associations." [1] The truth of this remark, if confined to the markedly philosophical

[1] Morley, *Critical Miscellanies*, II, 321.

poems, is borne out by the shiver which accompanies their perusal when the reader is sensitive. There is something disheartening, something homeless, in the inhospitable universe to which these personifications introduce us. They are not lugubrious: indeed they have plenty of sunshine of a sort; but it is the cheerless sunshine that falls upon emptiness, upon thinly settled prairies or unpeopled steppes.

The fault does not lie so much in the mere absence of human associations as in the unfulfilled promise of vital relationships which is held out to us in the institution of these spectral personalities. Emerson's abstractions, when undisguised, are by no means uncongenial; indeed, some of his noblest utterances in verse, such as the famous "The youth replies, I can," [1] are declarations of general truths in forms unmistakably general. Emerson could warm to an abstract truth, but not to the phantasm whom he engendered as its mouthpiece. Better a succulent abstraction, such as Emerson reared, than a juiceless personification. The truth is that, leaving out of view for the moment the question of verbal expression, and confining ourselves to the thoughts and images, the *philosophical* poems present ideas in forms more fantastic but at the same time less *imaginative* than those offered in the prose: to be bluntly candid, they are less poetical.

V. Ascension

At this point a pertinent question may be put: Granting that a barrier subsists between Emerson's verse and

[1] *Poems*, IX, 207.

the normal lover of poetry, may it not be a barrier of the same kind which prevents the schoolboy, heartily appreciative of "Horatius," "Ye Mariners of England," and "The Ballad of East and West," from finding any sustenance in "Tintern Abbey"? May not the cultivated world, in relation to Emerson, be the schoolboy? The greatness, and the fineness, of the man entitle this remonstrance to a respectful hearing.

It may be replied, however, that true verse does not readily elude the true lover of verse, even when the subject is remote or uncongenial. After all, poetry works its subtlest effects by concrete means, picture and melody; and if a taste for picture and melody be originally presupposed, it is hard to imagine that it would be quite nullified by the employment of picture and melody to convey abstruse or alien ideas. The authenticity of George Meredith's inspiration is recognizable by persons for whom the nature of his thought and expression offers insuperable barriers to the enjoyment of his verse. The insinuating yet at the same time planetary rhythm of Emerson's own "Brahma" reaches hearts incapable of response to the doubtful stimulus of its unaffecting thought. A second consideration is even more to the purpose. If in Emerson's philosophical poetry, a real enchantment is shorn of its due influence by the indifference of untutored minds to its themes, that indifference should be continuous as long as the subject is unchanged. But, in point of fact, the reading even of rather unsympathetic poems is crossed by moments of vivid imaginative pleasure. Can we account for these dots of sensation on a ground of relative insensibility

except by supposing that they represent the momentary outleaps of the fitful imaginative energy in the soul of the poet? The truth of this suggestion is confirmed by the undoubted exhibition of the same inequality in poems of a quite normal type — poems like the "Concord Ode" of 1857 — which the reader may approach without that chastening sense of dubious competence which "The Sphinx" or "The World-Soul" might conceivably inspire.

The point is one on which dogmatism would be impertinence, but the evidence is against the hypothesis that Emerson's poetry is underestimated because its charm is abstruse. The facts point to the conclusion that, while his matter may be abstruse, his charm is palpable.

VI. Distribution

The main difficulties in the poems of Emerson are two: want of organization (loosely designated by Arnold as want of concreteness),[1] and want of imagination in the materials of the philosophical poems, when viewed broadly as masses of ideas. From these defects two results might be conjectured: First, the shorter poems, where incoherence is less aggravated or less advertised, tend to be better than the larger ones, admitting the right of the critic who remembers "May-Day," the "Threnody," and "Voluntaries," to underscore or even to print in small capitals the word "tend." Second, the poems tend to improve in the ratio of their departure from philosophical ground, and their affiliation with

[1] Arnold, *Discourses in America*, 159.

normal human interests, domestic, political, or descriptive. The interest of Emerson's verse, therefore, centres partly in that section of his poems in which an exceptional method or a fortunate approach to actuality has suspended his normal inhibitions, and partly in the momentary but transcendent felicities which always star, and sometimes constellate, his entire work.

We have divided the more normal poems into three groups: domestic ("Threnody"), political ("Concord Hymn"), and descriptive ("May-Day"). Add the philosophical poems, and the variety is honorable to an author whose work seems to most readers distinctly homogeneous. But subdivision need not pause here. The number of *species* in Emerson's verse is large in proportion to the number of poems. He is always doing something not quite like other people and not quite like himself. "Good-bye" [1] is solitary among his own and other poems, in virtue of its mixture of unconcern and earnestness; "The Problem," [2] the friendliest of his poems, is a species by itself. "Terminus" [3] stands majestically aloof, and the mournful but sumptuous music of the "Voluntaries" [4] perished without reverberation. The "Threnody," [5] in its mingled abasement and exaltation, is insulated even from his pathetic verse. In the mountain and the squirrel anecdote he achieved and put by proficiency in fable.[6] "The Amulet" [7] was his initial and final experiment in what one might call a sort of firmamental *vers de société*. "The Adirondacs" [8]

[1] *Poems*, IX, 3–4.
[2] *Poems*, IX, 6–9.
[3] *Poems*, IX, 251–52.
[4] *Poems*, IX, 205–09.
[5] *Poems*, IX, 148–58.
[6] *Poems*, IX, 75.
[7] *Poems*, IX, 98–99.
[8] *Poems*, IX, 182–94.

is a picture of comradeship that has no companion in his works. "Wood-Notes" [1] may be paired with "Monadnoc," but only in a kind of "dual solitude." Where is the parallel to Brahma in spite of that person's contumacious insistence that the whole world is nothing but a repetition of himself? [2] "The Rhodora" hardly grew on the same slope which ripened "May-Day," [3] and the seeming brotherhood of the "Concord" and "Boston" [4] hymns merges into a dubious cousinship.

We noted not long since in Emerson's prose that the soil was astir with many varied impulses which rather heaved than actually broke the surface. It is interesting and confirmatory to note in the verse the reappearance, just below or just above the surface, of spring-like, manifold, germinative forces, still subject in part to the restraints of the withdrawing but unconquered force of the lingering Puritan winter. The returning heat has not quite dissolved the old numbness.

VII. Star-Dust

Emerson's second claim to eminence as a poet lies in the perfect though detached moments which the witchery of his music and phrase imparts to the sensitive and sympathetic reader. Of these enchantments, which even doubters and censors perceive, the *frequency* is moderate; the *range* is noteworthy; and the *quality* is incomparable.

Emerson's rhythm had two forms, expressive of two aspects of his contrasted nature: a noble and weighty

[1] *Poems*, IX, 43–59, 60–75.
[2] *Poems*, IX, 195.
[3] *Poems*, IX, 37–38, 163–81.
[4] *Poems*, IX, 158–59, 201–04.

blank verse in which his philosophic breadth and tranquillity found fit and high embodiment, and an airy, springing, buoyant lyricism, in which freedom and rapture are the dominating notes. The contrast reminds us of the fact that the same hand wrote "Tintern Abbey" and "The Daffodils." It is curious to observe, however, that Emerson has written no "Daffodils"; in other words he has written no short poem in several stanzas, in which the stanzas all dance to one tune. Just as, although intensely poetic, he had small aptitude for *poems*, so, although rich in lyricism, he scarcely wrote a typical lyric. His real lyrics, like the "Concord Hymn" are too stately to be typical, and the number of these is not large. His freer inspiration rarely pervades a poem; it is invasive rather than pervasive, and animates a couplet, triplet, or quatrain with here and there a more extended but still separable passage.

The felicity may be obvious or recondite. Emerson can invest with witchery a line of which the beats are regular as clock-ticks, —

"But if with gold she bind her hair," [1]

or he can write lines in which only a delicate ear can extricate the fine kernel of melody from its husk of encasing roughness.

"The rain comes when the wind calls." [2]

The various notes in this diapason are distinct and varied enough to deserve a brief and, naturally, incomplete enumeration.

[1] *Poems*, IX, 51.

[2] *Poems*, IX, 57.

1. *Vivacity:* —

"Gayest pictures rose to win me,
Leopard-colored rills." [1]

"Over the winter glacieres
I see the summer glow." [2]

2. *Mimetic sound:* sometimes elementary but transporting: —

"The red-wing flutes his *o-ka-lee*," [3]

Sometimes with mystic suggestion superadded: —

"Or flutes which passing angels blew." [4]

Or sometimes the mimicry is heavier and sterner: —

"Chiming with *the gasp and moan*
Of the ice-imprisoned flood." [5]

Or self-reverberant, in grandly spaced gradations: —

"And fired the shot heard round the world." [6]

3. *Impetuosity:* —

"And I will swim the ancient sea
To float my child to victory." [7]

"Will take the sun out of the skies
Ere freedom out of man." [8]

4. *Awesomeness or mystery:* —

"By lonely lakes to men unknown." [9]

"The whited desert knew me not," [10]

"In the long sunny afternoon
The plain was full of ghosts;" [11]

Only careful reading will evoke the fulness of sombre eloquence embosomed in the word "ghosts."

[1] *Poems*, IX, 60. [2] *Poems*, IX, 19. [3] *Poems*, IX, 169.
[4] *Poems*, IX, 178. [5] *Poems*, IX, 120. [6] *Poems*, IX, 158.
[7] *Poems*, IX, 150. [8] *Poems*, IX, 200. [9] *Poems*, IX, 164.
[10] *Poems*, IX, 164. [11] *Poems*, IX, 145.

5. *Antiquity:* —

"Old as the sun, old almost as the shade;" [1]

"Winds of remembering
Of the ancient being blow," [2]

"And matched his sufferance sublime
The taciturnity of time." [3]

6. *Elusiveness:* —

"What was that I heard
Out of the hazy land?" [4]

There are times when this question seems to be fit motto and exquisite summary for the whole of Emerson's verse.

7. *Pungency:* The lines are sometimes heavy with aroma.

"The South-wind brings
Life, sunshine and desire,
And on every mount and meadow
Breathes aromatic fire;" [5]

"The cordial quality of pear or plum
Ascends as gladly in a single tree
As in broad orchards resonant with bees;" [6]

Allied to this are lines of different theme but like quality, — slow, rich, absorptive, *porous* lines, — draining the sources of some hidden opulence.

"Nor cloy us with unshaded sun," [7]

"Cold is genial and dear." [8]

8. *Exuberance:* —

"What joy in rosy waves outpoured
Flows from the heart of Love, the Lord." [9]

[1] *Poems*, IX, 67. [2] *Poems*, IX, 126. [3] *Poems*, IX, 273.
[4] *Poems*, IX, 163. [5] *Poems*, IX, 148. [6] *Poems*, IX, 143.
[7] *Poems*, IX, 167. [8] *Poems*, IX, 168. [9] *Poems*, IX, 169.

"The litanies of nations came,
Like the volcano's tongue of flame,
Up from the burning core below, — " [1]

9. *Massiveness:* —

"The hand that rounded Peter's dome " [2]

"To wait an æon to be born." [3]

"I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn the Brahmin sings." [4]

10. *Suavity.* He can write some of the most clinging, the most wooing, lines in literature: —

"Daily the bending skies solicit man," [5]

Or that other line of almost nuptial solemnity: —

"The partial wood-gods overpaid my love," [6]

11. *Pathos:* —

"But over the dead he has no power,
The lost, the lost, he cannot restore; " [7]

12. *Gruesomeness:* —

" The ominous hole he dug in the sand," [8]

We have not reached the end of the list, but the patience of readers is sooner exhausted than the affluence of Emerson. Two qualities in the above series are especially conspicuous: the tingling, outleaping spontaneity, remarkable in a nature which seemed calm and measured to the superficial eye and which arraigned itself for sluggishness and hesitation; and the aromatic warmth and pungency, noteworthy in a character which was wont to deplore its want of hearty animal life, of

[1] *Poems*, IX, 7. [2] *Poems*, IX, 7. [3] *Poems*, IX, 153.
[4] *Poems*, IX, 195. [5] *Poems*, IX, 190. [6] *Poems*, IX, 141.
[7] *Poems*, IX, 148. [8] *Poems*, IX, 151.

soundness and exuberance of constitution. One further proof of the genuineness of his faculty must be set down. Nothing authenticates a poet more surely than the power to take an undistinguished word, and raise it in one magic stroke to something like empyreal compass and dignity. Where in English is there a word more pedestrian, more lounging and unambitious, than the word "fellows"? Emerson can dilate it to cosmic dimensions, and make it orchestral with music: —

> "The caged linnet in the Spring
> Hearkens for the choral glee,
> When his *fellows* on the wing
> Migrate from the Southern Sea;" [1]

Or if you love to watch the emergence of the butterfly from the ruptured chrysalis, study the treatment of the word "hazy" in the closing line of the same stanza:

> "And o'er yon hazy crest is Eden's balmier spring."

The variety in expansiveness which marks the foregoing series of quotations confirms the impression derived from a survey of the prose that in Emerson a nature of originally cabined and confined expression made a strong, self-transcending movement in the direction of expansiveness, variety, and freedom. That movement was in part successful, but both in the poetry and the prose was subject to an ultimate check. In the poetry, the check is not apparent in any limitation of the really marvellous spontaneity of individual lines or bits, but in the recurrence of constraint and awkwardness in the intervals that divide these culminations. His captivity was often suspended, but the sentence was never revoked.

[1] *Poems*, IX, 166.

VIII. Conclusion

Where does poetry concentrate itself, affirm and realize itself most fully? In wholes or in particles? Let us leave out of the reckoning the great dramatists and epic writers to whom Emerson is virtually unrelated; let us confine ourselves to writers of lyrics and modest narrative, to the class represented by Herbert, Marvell, Gray, Keats, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Rossetti, Alfred de Musset, Paul Verlaine, Heine, Carducci. Is the poetry of such men most evident in the large or in the little units?

If we approach poetry from the side of *literature*, if we view it as thought and style with rhythm superadded, we shall find its quintessence in the final or total effect. But if we approach poetry from the standpoint of *embodiment*, if we regard it as furnishing at the same time a physical and a moral impression coinciding in quality and effect, it is difficult to see how the whole can become the especial, the typical, seat of this coincidence. Is not the *aggregate* impression in poetry merely psychological? Do we find anywhere a *physical* total? Is the ear a reservoir of physical impressions? Does it accumulate sounds? Is not the truth rather that the mind accumulates sensations, each of which, on its entrance to the mind, was attended and enforced by a physical correlative?

A narrative poem, even a poem so brief as "Days," has an organism — plot, proportion, adaptation, climax — which is distinct both from its total sentiment and from its verbal or rhythmical felicities. But is not

this organism a psychological fabric? Can we say that a frame of this kind, which is capable of satisfactory reproduction in a prose version in a foreign tongue, embodies the spirit of the whole work in anything approaching to the vivid and intimate way in which "the moan of doves in immemorial elms" embodies the idea of which it is the mouthpiece? If poetry be the *union* of the physical and the moral effect, can that union be fully achieved or apprehended elsewhere than in the single stanza or brief passage?

There are counter-pleas undoubtedly. It is possible to retire upon the first of the two definitions of poetry in the foregoing paragraphs. It is possible to affirm that, whatever *poetry* may be, a *poem* is an organism, and that the obligations which the mere poet eludes reimpose themselves upon the man of letters. It is, again, possible to contend that the end of verse is the merging of many individual, minute, strictly poetical impressions in an ultimate impression absorptive of poetry and akin to poetry, though not really comprehended in the scope of the definition. These contentions are not baseless, but it remains probable that the mark of the pure love of poetry as such is an emphasis on particulars, that poetry is less effective in the continuity of reading than in the detachment of reminiscence, less effective, as Emerson himself would have said, in its own context than in citation in another's work. If a man utter a phrase like "burly, dozing humble-bee," [1] does it really matter so much whether he can repeat or sustain or enforce it in the succeeding lines or stanzas? The bee

[1] *Poems*, IX, 38.

is there — the whole bee — in that satisfying and inimitable line. What more does human nature want?

It must be always remembered that Emerson's case does not rest wholly on detached beauties; the weight of a modest number of effective compositions must be added to his claims. The truth as to these claims is less recondite than the brisk contention that has sprung up on his status as a poet would lead one to suppose. When we say that a man is or is not a poet, we are simply defining by indirection the past and future experience of readers. Both clearness and harmony would be promoted by stating the facts directly in terms of the psychology of readers rather than indirectly in terms of the attributes of Emerson. Few people would contradict us if we affirmed that for minds in whom the instinct of sequence preponderates over the feeling for poetry, Emerson cannot perform the service of a high poet; while, contrariwise he can do the work of a high poet for minds in whom the poetic receptiveness is strong and the instinct for sequence merely normal or subnormal. This is tame beside the assertion that Emerson is a poet, with its pungent implications as to the intellectual capacity of various critics who affirm that he is not. It is tame, likewise, beside the assertion that Emerson is not a poet, with its delicate hint that the existence of an opposite view would justify the country in the enlargement of its resources for the care of the feeble-minded. The above affirmation of divided experience has no such contentious piquancy: it has merely the plain merit of stating with some precision an unexciting truth.

CHAPTER VII

EMERSON'S PHILOSOPHY

I. Experience

The secret of Emerson may be conveyed in one word, the superlative, even the superhuman, value which he found in the unit of experience, the direct, momentary, individual act of consciousness. This is the centre from which the man radiates: it begets all and explains all. He may be defined as an experiment made by nature in the raising of the single perception or impression to a hitherto unimaginable value.

From this point of view, the fact that he wrote journals all his life, and that his published works are distillations of journals, acquires a quite novel significance. It is hard to believe that these grave volumes with their abstract themes are in essence a "Pepys' Diary," an ingathering of brief tinglings or stimulations. Such is, nevertheless, the fact.

The sceptic who calls for Emerson's personal testimony may be readily satisfied. "A single thought has no limit to its value." [1] "A rush of thoughts . . . the only conceivable prosperity." [2] "A man's whole possibility is contained in that habitual first look which he casts on all objects." [3]

The sentences that compose the works are all, in a

[1] "Natural History of Intellect," XII, 40.
[2] *Jour.* X, 335. [3] "Instinct and Inspiration," XII, 66.

sense, "tested recipes." They consist either of thoughts that, in actual experience, have yielded succulence, yielded stimulus, to their originator, or of intimations as to modes of procuring such thoughts; they are minutes of results or suggestions of methods. Nay, the very methods are numbered among the stimuli. The doctrine of "Self-Reliance," a guidepost to inspirations, is no less definitely an inspiration itself. So the lamp which makes beautiful objects apparent may be itself an object of beauty, and the stem (as in cauliflower) which supports an edible blossom may be itself edible.

The great value in life being thus established, the theory of the conduct of life is plain. Life is a quest of thoughts, a pursuit of inspirations. Beside these ends, land and goods and house and fame are nothing, and wife and child may count themselves lucky if they escape relegation to the class of baggage. Is this a consuming egotism? Not as Emerson sees it, or in any sense which the vulgar can suspect. The reader's title to an explanation on this point will be satisfied later. Meanwhile, let us remember that, for Emerson all values, even truth-values, are experimental; nothing counts that is not enjoyable, consumable, digestible; even knowledge is either nutriment or refuse.

II. Logic

We must bear in mind steadily that this experience is not massed or blocked; its field is the moment; it is nuclear or particular, or, to get the pith from the etymology, subsisting in particles. Hence this isolative

philosophy is unfriendly to logic, which is synthetic and comprehensive. We might dismiss the case briefly by saying that the Emersonian view is atomic, while logic is molecular. But this is too figurative and too curt: a further explanation is desirable.

The man and the percept (the nutrient, the stimulative, percept) — that is the reality, that is the world. Anything that interposes between the direct contact of man and percept is an obstacle to be brusquely pushed aside. Now what does logic do? It furnishes the reason or argument; that is, it offers a truth which you cannot directly digest or enjoy, as the needful preliminary to another truth in whose digestible and enjoyable properties you may find compensation later on. It is the secretary in the outward office whom you do not personally care to see, but who is your sole means of access to the jealously guarded inner sanctum that enshrines the object of your search. But Emerson, for whom the direct experience is imperative, has no patience with niggling preliminaries and officious mediators. He strides past the offended secretary, to the consternation of the formal habitués of the well-drilled establishment, and finds himself without warning or permit in the cabinet of the great man. To defend this procedure is not our present business: we are content if we can make it intelligible.

Emerson, then, is disinclined to logic; he does not care to be delayed or to be bored. But the folly of critics, encouraged by a word of his own, has converted this disinclination into incapacity. Emerson did write in 1838 to Henry Ware: "For I do not know what arguments

mean in reference to any expression of a thought."[1] Now this is, in the parlance of our forefathers, "mighty pretty." If there existed in the language of the angels some celestial equivalent for that useful Americanism, "bluff," and we could come at that word, we should deprecatingly and reverently apply it to that particular sentence in Emerson's admirable letter to Henry Ware. The sentence begins with a shameless "for"; moreover, the convenience of infirmity is only too palpable: if you are without hands, people cannot ask you to split their firewood.

Emerson was, in fact, perfectly capable of using the syllogism, the nucleus of all deductive logic, and of writing, when he chose, an argumentative discourse. The sermon on the Lord's Supper, as Moncure D. Conway rightly avers, is a perfectly clear example of "consecutive logical reasoning."[2] The letters to Aunt Mary in the time of his theological novitiate[3] and the "Journals" of the same period should remove any doubts of Emerson's capacity from the mind of any critic who retains the capacity himself. There is argument in good measure in the anti-slavery speeches, and the "American Civilization" address in Washington (to which Moncure D. Conway is said to have furnished suggestions) is almost unmixed argument.[4] The second essay on "Art," in "Society and Solitude," is a rare but pregnant instance of the dedication of an essay to the sup-

[1] Cabot, II, 693.

[2] Conway, 72. But see Dr. Emerson's note on this address, *Works*, XI, 550.

[3] Cabot, I, 103–06.

[4] "American Civilization," XI, 297–311; *Jour.* IX, 373 note.

port of a unified thesis. The lecture on "The Conservative" is mainly occupied with an impartial and forcible debate.[1] Even the essays proper are not chary of reasons, and what is an argument but a reason under fire? Mr. Brownell points misgivingly to the absence of "therefores," [2] but one can reason all day without a "therefore" as one can command all day without a "shall." In the Tufts College speech [3] there is an express dilemma. The man is even capable of putting a syllogism with all three of its parts, premises and conclusion, into a rhymed stanza: —

> "Pay ransom to the owner
> And fill the bag to the brim.
> Who is the owner? The slave is owner,
> And ever was. Pay him." [4]

Emerson's failure in mathematics and his avoidance of metaphysics (which might naturally have fallen in his way) may be readily explained without the contumelious insinuation that he was disqualified for drawing an inference. It is probably not so much the laboriousness as what we might call the asceticism of these alpine sciences that makes them redoubtable to many minds. The reason is not overtasked, but the imagination and the sensibilities are underfed. Now if a mind ever existed in which the appetite of these latter faculties was persistent and insatiable, it was the mind of Emerson. In the face of the "impossible analytical geometry" and (we may fairly suppose) of the "Critique of Pure Reason," he was not beaten: he was starved.

[1] "The Conservative," I, 295–326.
[2] Brownell, *American Prose Masters*, 143.
[3] *Works*, XII, 115.
[4] *Poems*, IX, 204.

The same need is the source of a real disability in Emerson which people have mistakenly identified with the incapacity to infer the unknown from the known. When a subject has yielded many considerations, some pro, some contra, some divided, some ambiguous, the task of holding all these points simultaneously in mind, of noting how they abet, retrench, or offset one another, and of finally striking the balance, becomes troublesome to the intellect and arid to the imagination. The "standing together" of things, the *consistency*, lay out of reach of his ability and even of his aspiration. As an advocate, he might have made a shift to offer a plea; as a judge he could hardly have summed up the evidence.

III. Conflux

Our analysis has advanced two steps: we have found the secret of Emerson in the ascendency of the unit of experience, and we have related this unit to the misstated and exaggerated incapacity for reasoning. The next step is to fix the contents of this unit. What constituted this perception? What measured its value and significance?

There are four immemorial routes of human aspiration, definable for us still under the ancient names of beauty, truth, virtue, and God. The pursuits correlative with these ends are known as art, science, morality, and religion. A man fitted to raise experience to its highest power must be profoundly responsive to all four appeals, — a proposition which is verified in Emerson. But a further question arises: Which is primary? Which lends most vividness and meaning to perception? No

man can answer that question for mankind; but if you are the descendant of an heroic line of godly and dedicated men, if you are born in Boston in 1803, if you are nobly tempered and are highly and austerely reared, the chances that in your scale of values religion will be first are very high. The point we here reach is capital: religion is primary and authoritative; it is the standard by nearness to which, or association with which, all other assets and faculties must be gauged.

What becomes of the three other pursuits by this standard? Ethics, clearly, are safe; the Good is either fused with the Divine or is united with it in the most intimate of partnerships. God — to some men a mere synonym for virtue — is, at worst, its inspirer, its ægis, and its pattern: and the moral traits are not merely beneficent but holy; the reflection of the divine beam brightens their native lustre. But how stands it with these two other seemingly quite distinct though not unfriendly puissances of truth and beauty? The originality of Emerson may be said to lie in the fact that the same intimacy of relation which the consent of mankind had established between Deity and ethics he proceeded to set up between Deity and truth, between Deity and beauty.

The abstract hypothesis of a common source for truth, beauty, and goodness in the divine being is, of course, long prior to Emerson. Metaphysics is hardly an alert science, but, between its dreary paucity of topics and its strong propensity for unification, it could hardly fail to stumble upon the idea that truth and beauty, clearly elements of the world, should be declara-

tions or manifestoes of the power that holds the world in its grasp. The simple yet mighty innovation brought forth by Emerson was to set this idea to work, to *base life* on this proposition, not merely to *affirm* but to *discover* — and re-discover a thousand times — the divine principle in particular experiences of truth and beauty. Not abstraction, but extraction, is the word that defines his originality. A reservation must be made, however, in favor of the priority of Wordsworth in the utilizing of landscape for this purpose. Both he and Emerson had a remarkable capacity for sitting down in the plainest, sturdiest fashion to live out a great ideal year by year and second by second.

The confluence of beauty and truth with religion is not remote or prospective: it is wrought, for Emerson, here and now. He is not put off with mere evidence that the four great routes of human aspiration lead eventually to one goal. That goal itself is a delight of the journey: the "far blue eye" of the mountain peak toward which several highways converge becomes visible from every point of each route as a solace and inspiration both to eye and heart.

If a man is born to sublimate the moment — each moment, and he loves one thing best, it is clear that every moment must be made a sharer in the thing he most loves. The exquisite address with which nature solved her problem — for, be it clearly understood, it is not Emerson's conscious problem but nature's problem in rearing an Emerson that is solved in these delicate combinations — has been made clear in the facts of the foregoing paragraphs.

IV. Sensibility

Pictures and song will teach religion to no man who has not first loved song and pictures for their own sake. Truth and beauty cannot be made the occasions of religious profit to a soul that has not first prized them as truth and beauty. It is good politics to send an ambassador who is friendly with the receiving state, but the friendship must precede the embassy. Take out the religious bias, and the *disinterested* passion — the passion for mere truth, mere beauty — would have sufficed still to make Emerson remarkable.

This plain New Englander has strange utterances on the point of beauty. "Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight, under a clouded sky," he is "glad to the brink of fear." [1] He beholds the morning "with emotions which an angel might share." [2] There is "no disgrace, no calamity" (leaving him his eyes), "which nature cannot repair." [3] One suspects that in mere *receptiveness* — putting creation aside — he rivalled Spenser or Shelley. A trail of the purple, a kingliness as it were, marks his appropriation to his use of the grandeurs of the external world. An eye for landscape and for persons and an ear for poetry were the two points in which the organic sensibility quickened to the verge of rapture. The point of interest for us now is the strength and fineness of this primitive sensation.

On the side of truth, likewise, not merely the prophet in Emerson but the natural man was pervaded by a hunger for facts. His demand for entertainment —

[1] "Nature," I, 9. [2] "Nature," I, 17. [3] "Nature," I, 10.

high-class entertainment undoubtedly — was persistent and insatiable. He had the busiest as well as the profoundest of minds; he packed the day with impressions: succession, variety, surprise were indispensable to his well-being. He needed news like a clubman, though the news might belong, if you liked, to Nineveh in the pre-Christian era. Hence his impatience of vacuities, human or other, and his impalement of bores and pedants on the point of his versatile pen. Hence his interest in the acquisition of fact, and his power to erect that interest into a flag of truce beneath which he could converse amicably with persons who might have found his general views inscrutable or ridiculous. The curiosity seems to have widened as he matured and to have strengthened rather than failed with the advent of old age. His requisitions were so great that he became for their sake the pattern of observers; hunger cultivates alertness.

When we have once grasped the force of this impulse in the mere heathen Emerson, so to speak, we are prepared for the magnitude of the result when the devout Emerson confers on every fact the added force of a religious value.

V. Universality

The words "every fact" in the last sentence were used advisedly. Beauty controls only one section of life, but truth is all-embracing. Every fact, then, is endued with the capacity to furnish religious sustenance to man.

The mere declaration of the possibility is futile. It

differs from practice quite as much as the assertion of vague suzerainty over a vast continent differs from the actual collection of tribute in the form of corn or gold or wine. The point in Emerson's case is that the tribute was actually collected.

He made no exception. As in Judea, at the birth of Jesus, the whole world must be taxed. He took in the industrial fact (the farm is a mute gospel, and ethics sparkle on the chisel edge); [1] the homely fact ("What! has my stove and pepperpot a false bottom"); [2] the commercial fact (even political economy is a "Bible"); [3] the jarring fact; the cruel fact; even the obscene fact,[4] which, as he clearly tells us, shall be summoned to offer its testimony. The peculiarity of Emerson might be defined in these terms: he brought into the service of the religious instinct a larger amount and greater variety of material than was ever applied to that function by any other of the sons of men. He is supreme in the magnitude of his resources.

It is not to be overlooked that he had at his beck and call a collector of unexampled efficiency — the nineteenth century. But the rarer good fortune lay in the coincidence of an extraordinary mental activity with a perfectly clear perception of the bearing of every form of mental activity on the nourishment of the religious sense.

A strong religious bent in former ages faced an unpleasing alternative. If the devout man wished to give

[1] "Nature," I, 42; "Compensation," II, 115.
[2] "Beauty," VI, 304.
[3] "Wealth," VI, 89.
[4] "The Poet," III, 17.

himself exclusively to his vocation, he withdrew to the cloister or the desert, shut out the world, and rigidly narrowed his activity; this led to the starving of his life, and even finally to the shrivelling of the religious instinct itself in the general atrophy of manhood. If, on the contrary, he continued his life in the world, his religion was confined to one precinct of his existence, or merely served, like watch or compass, as an occasional guide or corrective, in the conduct of secular pursuits. But the moment we give to every pursuit a religious bearing, the rigor of this alternative is abated. It becomes theoretically possible for an exclusively religious nature to pursue an exclusively religious life in the midst of the animating and stimulative variety of secular surroundings.

We say, theoretically possible; for limitations are quick to show themselves in practice. The advanced religionist is no more secure of his power of extracting spiritual nutriment from a given object or event than the conservative worshipper is sure of invariable refreshment from the conventional apparatus of prayers and sermons. Fortune and mood are participant in both cases. Moreover, it is only in retrospect or recession that action yields its contemplative values to the faithful; the deed is *legible* only in the memory. Emerson, by the bye, has spoken exaltingly of action in "The American Scholar," [1] and doubtfully or slightingly of it in other places; but his attitude remains entire and harmonious. The thought, the perceptive moment, is supreme: action as a *spur* to thought is invaluable; but

[1] "The American Scholar," 94–100.

action as a consequence or expression of thought is immaterial; [1] it is merely thought republished in large capitals.

Inequality, then, the mark of all authentic emotional life, is stamped upon Emerson's spiritual experience. We like to think of him as calm, and the word no doubt fits his demeanor, but his life in fact mimicked the hazard and vicissitude of the gamester's. Day by day he played for high stakes, — the insights which summed up human values for him, — sometimes winning, more often losing, always uncertain, ranging the whole scale from exultation to despondency. His life had the dramatic poignancy proper to the artist's or the adventurer's — to all lives, in short, in which the scope of fortune and the uncertainty are both great.

The extraction of spiritual good from the order of nature, from things at large, is not the most facile of undertakings. The cult favors reverence, perhaps, but hardly devotion. Churches — both in the architectural and the institutional sense — are enclosed; for enclosure — in its literal and its symbolic meaning — fosters piety. To make an Emerson, piety had to be raised to an unexampled intensity under the nurture of the auspicious Christian dispensation, and then transferred in undiminished fulness to the forms of divinity supplied by the broad cosmos. It is very doubtful if the cosmos was ever so worshipped before, if, without this transfer, it could evoke this ardor of piety. Piety of a kind is discernible in the religious attitude of Plato and Plotinus who evolved their cosmic deity from their private feel-

[1] "Spiritual Laws," II, 161.

ing and intelligence; but its flame is slender beside the Emersonian blaze. Shelter before exposure, the seedling in the hothouse, the embryo in the womb, — shelter as the condition that insures safety and thrift in subsequent liberation, — that is, the law obeyed in the rearing of Emerson.

This transference to one mode of faith of a set of feelings proper to another has a quite special bearing on the applicability of the Emersonian cult to men in whom this powerful primary *charge* of Puritan Christianity is wanting. It is by no means true that Emerson's later faith subsisted on the savings of his Puritanism, that he spent day by day his waning accumulations. His religion was a self-supporting enterprise, not a hoard, but capital actively employed and supplying dividends far more punctually than his precarious investments in bank stock or railways. The business, however, was of that not unusual kind which only a large initial outlay could have rendered lucrative. The lesson to the penniless is clear.

VI. Reconstruction

The apt moment has now come for replying to an objection which may have crossed the minds of thoughtful readers at our first affirmation that the cardinal point in Emerson was the aggrandizement of the single experience. The aggrandizement of the unit of consciousness, of the moment, it may be asked, — is that a step in advance, and not rather the extreme of recrudescence? That is pagan, that is barbarous, that is infantine, that is animal. True, in a sense; but let us distinguish. To

these lower types, the moment is everything, but, even so, it is little. To Emerson, it is not merely *all;* it is *much.* The return to concentration in the moment is effected under conditions which make the moment worth far more than it ever was or could have been to those who had never left its precinct. The race has been educated by previsions and retrospects and, thus fortified, it reverts to the emphasis on the present experience. The man has come back to his childish starting-place, but he comes prepared to enrich it with the spoils and trophies of his voyage round the world.

VII. Iconoclasm

The supreme good is the integrity of the moment. The relation between the man and his perception is sacred, and whatever interposes between the two is noxious and profane. It is clear, then, that the impression of yesterday has no right to invade or impair the impression of to-day. At a stroke, therefore, we are rid of the bugbear of consistency.[1]

Truth is not, as the common view supposes, a whole built up of tiny increments to which the moments successively contribute. Each moment, on the contrary, is a band encircling the whole of truth. Conceive, if you will, a celestial sphere in which the moments are great circles, equal to one another yet distinct, each engirdling an entire globe and the same globe.

But if not even a man's past experience is to intervene between himself and his percept, how much less the experience, past or present, of any other man! To imitate

[1] "Self-Reliance," II, 56–60.

or conform is to subordinate *my* sense of things to another man's, to admit an alien or profane element into that private and sacred session which I hold with my present thought.

Does this rule lose its force if the other man be great? No. If the consensus of mankind supports his teaching? No. If he be lifted to the post of demigod, and the ages march in his retinue? No.

It is quite plain that the apparently harmless thesis we have been advocating contains in its implications the doom of historical Christianity. Only one thing could preserve that institution. We are not bound to *originate* all our ideas; we are only bound to *test* them. If an idea broached by another mind fits us, feeds us, aids us, our license of appropriation is unbounded. But if an issue, a disparity arises, the claim of our private feeling to precedence is absolute.

There came, in point of fact, a period in Emerson when he found himself increasingly unresponsive to the Unitarian orthodoxy in which he had been reared. He was in no haste to put that teaching by. On the contrary, he seems to have kept his old Unitarian creed and his new cosmic faith side by side in his mind for a considerable period, as one keeps an aging and respectable servant in the house by the side of a younger, abler, but unproved domestic. The figure of service is apt, because with Emerson these creeds were not two *theories* whose *truth* was in question, but two *methods* to be tested for *efficiency*. Which would yield more of the right kind of moments? — that was all. When, at last, the decision came, he rejected Unitarianism in precisely

the same spirit in which a capitalist withdraws his funds from an investment of which the returns are diminishing or a housewife gives over a stove which has ceased to perform good service. The question of the abstract plausibility, consistency, or defensibility of the propositions was a thing of no interest: in our vigorous vulgar parlance he "wanted the goods."

VIII. Self-Reliance

Was the change thus described a "crisis"? The complete absence of any hint of uneasiness from the published works, even from the recent "Journals," would suggest that the alteration was noiseless and placid. On the other hand, a single circumstance — single but powerful — indicates that this change of base was the poignant event of Emerson's life. That circumstance is the extreme and surprising prominence given forever after in his philosophy to the doctrine of "Self-Reliance."

Extreme and surprising, for, in a calm estimate, what is self-reliance? It is not the beatific vision for which and in which (to the measure of his power) Emerson lived; it is not patriotism, liberty, holiness, God, self-sacrifice, justice, love, nor any other of the great human watchwords that count their roll of poets and martyrs. If it holds an honorary place among the major virtues, it must thank Emerson for its canonization. Its position among moral traits is rather that of the manly yeoman among lords and gentlefolk, sincerely esteemed but scarcely made much of. Moreover, for Emerson himself, its office is mediate or instrumental. Had he found the

same benefits to arise from imitation or conformity, there is no reason to doubt his ready acquiescence in the shift of means. Yet this mere instrument receives a space and stress in his writings five times as great as justice, or love, or heroism, or any other of the high purposes of existence.

The world and Emerson are pretty well agreed that a strong man is bound to obey his best judgment and insight against the opposition of society. Most thoughtful men will probably agree that to substitute for the phrase, "Follow your insight," addressed to the strong man, the phrase, "Follow your instinct," addressed to everybody, is an infelicitous and even reckless mode of giving emphasis to a plain truth. The reason for the substitution is fairly clear. To say, "Obey your instincts," is revolutionary; to say, "Obey your higher instincts," an equally feasible and far more exact phrase, is banal; every automaton and every hypocrite will say as much. In the choice of the more striking and more questionable phrase, Emerson "obeyed his instinct," turning precept itself into example.

His fearlessness in sanctioning instincts is of course explicable in part by the decorum of his own character. Take the four instincts which are hardest to manage and most destructive when uncurbed: the love of food and drink,[1] sex, anger, cupidity. There is reason, both in abstract probability and in concrete evidence, to believe that no one of these gadflies ever seriously troubled Emerson. Still, after all explanations, his unconcern is a little baffling. To take that troublesome matter of sex,

[1] *E. in C.* 152–55.

for instance: could even a saint, who was male as well as saint, have grown from babyhood to manhood without facing one or two occasions when instinct urged the clearly inexpedient and unrighteous thing? And, in the face of even one such warning, could he have nerved himself to write the equivocating word "instinct" when all he meant was "intuition"?

The value of the defence of self-reliance does not rest in the teaching; in that teaching, doctrines which most men, in our day at least, would admit beforehand to be true are embodied in forms which many men would concede to be questionable. The value, which is great, lies almost wholly in the impulsion. The *direction* is obvious enough, but the *pressure* is unexampled.

The doctrine is itself subject to one qualification or caveat. The precept of self-reliance is a pungent bit of autobiography; Emerson made a private experiment and published the results. Test everything for yourself, he says. Precisely, but why not, then, test self-reliance? Why accept as authoritative and universal even a law that declares that no authority is legitimate and that no rule is universal? Let the thoughtful disciple, instead of taking Emerson's *result* as a *postulate*, which smacks far too much of the reviled imitation and dependence, rather take Emerson's *conduct* as an *example*, and find out by personal experiment whether adhesion to counsel and custom or obedience to impulse is the profitable alternative in his own life. It is quite conceivable that the adhering or dependent instinct might be the dominant instinct in certain beings; nature made barnacles as well as fishes.

Let us, then, set down this truth in plain terms: Emerson believed that each man was the sole judge and arbiter of his own good. The full meaning of this proposition will appear in the sequel.

IX. Impedimenta

We return, again, to the supremacy of the all-inclusive moment. Two things contest that supremacy, space and time. The combat is interesting.

The moment declares that its scope is all-embracing. Space ridicules this assumption, declares that the single experience is confined to a petty spot of ground on a great planet which is itself an infinitesimal particle in the dim reach of a boundless universe. Time, quite as roughly, insists that the status of the moment is despicable; insignificant in the stretch of a year, it is below even insignificance in the compass of a century, which again is a mote or dust-film in respect of the unmeasured and unconceived eternity. This is contumelious usage. If the single experience is to hold up its head, it is clear that it must get rid of time and space.

The Germans, fortunately, have been beforehand with us, and have taken down the conceit of these bullies. They have shown that time and space are mere forms for the setting forth, in commodious order and distinctness, of the real truths that concern the intelligence, counters, if you please, for the display of goods, or blackboards on which the great power that educates us draws pictures and diagrams illustrative of basic truths. Emerson drew in this teaching eagerly; his originality lay mostly in applications, and it is doubtful if any mind

ever lived that succeeded better in freeing itself from the obsession of these bugbears. He speaks of time and space indeed as he might of Jack and Jill or Little Bo-peep or like figures of nursery legend which the growing lad discards with other playthings. Of course, no man — not even Emerson — can ignore time and space in the daily conduct of life. In his Walden walks, his legs had to give strict account of every yard of space quite as surely as those of the sturdiest farmer in Concord, and his punctuality at the dinner hour seems to have put him in a position to comment satirically on the tardiness of his household.[1] But, in his contemplative moments, perhaps even from boyhood, the power of *likeness* over his mind was so extraordinary that distance in time and space between two like objects became a negligible and despicable thing.

This eclipse of distance, spatial or temporal, became a real aid, in some respects, to his philosophy. In the first place, it wiped out the interval between himself and the Neo-Platonists, between himself and the Orientals, and made them, to all intents and purposes, coevals. Again, his scorn of time enabled him to realize as men have rarely done the plasticity and fluidity of institutions, and to make clear and near to his prophetic eye ameliorations which seemed fabulous to men who saw them in the dim perspective of the future.

A third consequence was, or should have been, not the settlement, but the abolition, of the problem of immortality, the annihilation in this case choosing the question instead of the questioner for its victim. Dura-

[1] *Jour.* VI, 475.

tion or perpetuity is inconceivable in the absence of time. Emerson, as we have seen, had a divided mind on the question of the future life. There were times when he was content to accept the expansibility of the moment to heroic or supernal dimensions as a full equivalent for immortality.[1] There were other times when he fixed his eyes on the expansibility of the individual, and felt that nothing less than infinite time would suffice to bridge the abyss between his capacities and his attainments.[2] He indulges, in "Immortality," the "low curiosity" which he censured in "The Over-Soul." [3] "A man of thought is willing to die, willing to live," [4] he courageously affirms; but it is plain that he desires perpetuity, an attitude which, if immortality is to be viewed as a furtherance to experience, his temper made inevitable.

Remove, then, these cramps of time and space, and the moment, the point, rises to its full altitude. The *Now* seems brief because it is empty; *pack* it, and its bulk augments. The generosity of the moment is limited only by our receptiveness. The object of more time is more life, — an end which intensity meets quite as effectually as duration.

X. Reason

This deletion of time and space is intolerable to the hodman; it is foreign even to the philosopher in his active or pedestrian moods.[5] It follows that the two parts of his life seem unreal and chimerical to each other. A

[1] "The Over-Soul," II, 282–85.
[2] "Immortality," VIII, 338–39.
[3] "The Over-Soul," II, 283–84.
[4] "Immortality," VIII, 329.
[5] "Nature," I, 49.

man uses two pairs of spectacles. The first declare that the horizon and the distant mountains are a meaningless blur, and that the printed page, ten inches from the eye, is made up of intelligible characters. The second affirm that the printed page is a foolish confusion, and that the horizon and the peaks are forms of clear and impressive beauty. It is quite plain that in the explanation of these disparities the man is greatly aided by the undeniable fact of the existence of the two instruments. If the changes occurred in a vision unaided by lenses, the bewilderment would be almost irremediable.

In precisely the same fashion, this double attitude of the mind toward time and space and possibly toward other notions would be greatly simplified by the postulate of two instruments or compartments or faculties in the mind, each of which should take charge of one class of material. The industrious Germans have once more anticipated our demands: they have distinguished between the Understanding, an efficient factotum or bailiff who takes care of all the ordinary business of life, and the Reason which applies itself to the seizure of absolute truth. Our own period, which is disposed to make a puddle of the mind, and even to confound mind and matter in a mush, takes little interest in the separation of the intelligence into faculties, but to Emerson, particularly in his younger days, when the doctrine reached New England from Germany *via* Coleridge, it wore the aspect of a release, an inspiration. "I think it a philosophy itself," he writes to Edward in 1834.[1]

The absence of inspired books, which resulted from

[1] Cabot, I, 218.

Emerson's relinquishment of the churchly attitude toward the Bible, may have urged the young seeker to accept a substitute in an inspired *faculty*. At all events the idealist with an eye for facts will clearly find a special convenience in the notion of two distinct planes of life and intellect, to one of which he can remand the whole ragged regiment of troublesome and disreputable facts, while he reserves the other inviolate for his tranquillities and his optimisms. Man errs, but the Reason is infallible. Man sins, but the Reason finds sin merely negative. Man dies, but the Reason is deathless. To the senses nature is absolute; to the Reason it is provisional.[1] The superstitions of theology are merely the distortions which the truths of Reason undergo when they descend into the sphere of Understanding, — the refraction or crooking of the stick as it passes from air into water.[2]

The sphere of Reason is truth, justice, love, and the other timeless abstractions. Its participation gives value to the momentary experience, yet it refuses countenance to time and space; its interest is confined to perpetuities. How strangely different, from this point of view, appears that absorption in the moment which we found to be central and primary in Emerson! The moment keeps its preëminence, but its *content* is *eternity*.

In the essays on Montaigne, Emerson remarks that we may count upon something like half a dozen reasonable hours in *fifty years*.[3] So low an estimate is incredible in his own case. It may be not useless to add, that, while

[1] "Nature," I, 49–50. [2] "Address," I, 129.
[3] "Montaigne," IV, 178–79.

he never abandoned the distinction between the Reason and the Understanding, the value he set on it appears to have waned with time. The index to the "Journals" contains fifteen formal references under the heading "Reason." Fourteen of these belong to the first five volumes of the ten-volume edition, and the reader's impression supports this arithmetic.

XI. Illusion

If a man lives on two planes, one plane will absorb more of his life than the other, and the draft of things upon our life is one great measure of their reality. The rebirth in his consciousness of the old Platonic, the old Hindoo, theory of illusion becomes inevitable.

The average man, absorbed in the concrete, finds abstractions chimerical. Emerson, living always more deeply in the abstract, found the busy, noisy, saucy march of life more and more of a game and puppet-play. From the paring of one's nails to the establishment of a railroad, from the harvesting of one's Seckels to the election of a president, the movement of life became pictorial, illustrative, and unsubstantial. This feeling had that peculiar sureness and massiveness which inhered in all his convictions, and one of the quaintest and prettiest anecdotes that are told of him represents him as saying to a group of friends whom he had left for a moment to settle the disposition of a load of wood: "We have to attend to these matters just as if they were real." [1]

Let us try to define more sharply this reality. Within

[1] Albee, *Remembrances of Emerson*, 104.

us and without us lies a force that we may call law or spirit or deity or Over-Soul, or pretty much anything we like that is not shackling or restrictive. The disinterested *recognition* of this law is reality in *perception;* the disinterested *fulfilment* of this law is reality in *conduct.* Other perceptions, other conduct, are unreal. A tree as a tree is nothing; but to be there in the earth, to be what and as it is, certain laws had to be obeyed; as a clew to those laws, it is real. It would touch reality again, if it became the occasion for the fulfilment of laws by human beings. Wife and child are real only in this sense; I am real only as I see and obey this law. The intensest joys, the keenest agonies, are real only so far as they become contributors to wisdom or occasions to virtue, — a fact which throws light on Emerson's disposition to take suffering somewhat lightly. In the searching essay on "Experience" [1] he complains — a strange word in this context but precise — of the failure of even disasters like the death of his son to touch the springs of reality in his mind.

It will be seen that this outlook on life is simple. *Clear* it is not — the majority would find it unintelligible; *concrete* it is not: but *simple,* fixing itself unalterably upon one object, without division of eye or of aim — it emphatically is. The life which expressed this attitude was simple likewise.

XII. Equations

We have yet more to say of the law mentioned in the last section. The truth on this point is various, and to

[1] "Experience," III, 48–49.

express this variety without the appearance of self-contradiction is difficult. The attempt, however, cannot be evaded.

Emerson, after putting aside verbal revelation and rejecting miracle as "monster," [1] came to have a distinct relish for the perfect mechanic regularity of a quite undeviating universe. He enjoyed the sureness of mechanism, and one doubts if he hated the austerity of mathematics any more than he loved its precision. Failure in analytical geometry proved to be quite reconcilable with admiring reference to Kepler's laws, and with obsequious and affectionate recurrence to the great principles enunciated by Newton. He was for spirit, every fibre of him: yet even in spirit he relished the exactness of clockwork. He admired that inflexible order which broke neither its rule nor its silence, and would have us build altars to what he thrice designates as the "Beautiful Necessity." [2]

He went even further than science; he attributed to nature a precision which the facts fail to justify. His theory of life abounds in hypothetical and dubious equations. He affirmed the following propositions: —

First, the equipoise between pleasure and pain, and its consequence, the equality of destinies.

Second, the equivalence between merit and reward, and likewise between guilt and punishment. These laws (first and second) he chose to designate by the suggestively mechanical name of "compensation." [3]

Third, the equivalence between desert and reputa-

[1] "Address," I, 129.
[2] "Fate," VI, 48–49.
[3] "Compensations," II, 93–127.

tion, expounded in "Spiritual Laws." [1] "A man passes for what he is worth." [2] "As much goodness as there is, so much reverence it commands." [3]

Fourth, the equivalence between character and influence, expounded in "Character," [4] "All things work exactly according to their quality and according to their quantity." [5]

He even loves the word "mathematical" in these associations. "The eternal laws of mind . . . adjust the relation of all persons to each other by the mathematical relation of their havings and beings." [6] "The effect of any writing on the public mind is mathematically measurable by its depth of thought." [7]

To the above list may be added other examples, less clear-cut or less diligently emphasized: —

The equivalence of all states of society to each other, taught in "Self-Reliance." [8]

The equality of men's knowledge, taught in "Intellect" ("Everybody knows as much as the savant"); [9] and in "Representative Men" ("All men are at last of a size"). [10]

The equivalence between wealth and economic ability and virtue taught in "Wealth." [11]

The equivalence between being and experience, taught in "Spiritual Laws" ("He may see what he maketh") [12] and in "Fate" ("Events expand with the character"). [13]

[1] "Spiritual Laws," II, 153–160.
[2] "Spiritual Laws," II, 157.
[3] "Spiritual Laws," II, 158.
[4] "Character," III, 89–115.
[5] "Character," III, 101.
[6] "Spiritual Laws," II, 149.
[7] "Spiritual Laws," II, 153.
[8] "Self-Reliance," II, 84–87.
[9] "Intellect," II, 330.
[10] "Uses of Great Men," IV, 31.
[11] "Wealth," VI, 100–01.
[12] "Spiritual Laws," II, 148.
[13] "Fate," VI, 42.

This body of propositions is curious. They insist on a trimness and crispness in the results of law which even the most tenacious partisans of law have never asserted. They demand a universe which, in obeying orders, shall touch its cap, so to speak, like a dutiful subordinate. Curious, also, is the fact that hardly one of these assertions is either capable of proof, or agreeable to the intuition of mankind. An inexact mind is revealed in the very insistence on exactness.

XIII. Mechanism

The moral equivalence, cited above, arrests us for a moment. An idealist, seeing the universe to be a perfect physical mechanism, and seeing likewise that it has, after its fashion, a moral trend, is moved strongly to accept the inference that it is a perfect *moral* mechanism. The temptation proved irresistible to Emerson.

To most men the universe enforces gravitation, while it recommends probity. It will not permit the breach of a material law for a tenth of a second by the fraction of a dust-flake, but it will allow millions of men for hundreds of years to violate the fundamental edicts of morality. It may *protest* in the form of pain and loss, but it does not *inhibit*. The institution of civic and national police is a drastic commentary on the world's success in policing itself, and the setting-up of heaven and hell expresses with unsparing candor the opinion of mankind on the effectiveness of merely natural rewards and penalties. It is generally assumed that a man's morality cannot safely be trusted to the inductions he makes from personal observation and experience. Legal

and social penalties, with an inherited and inculcated love of right, are thought to be the needful supplements to his own private digest of the nature of things. The weight almost universally accorded to judicial, educational, and religious safeguards is the measure of the popular sense that the justice done by unaided nature is obscure, tardy, and irregular.

Emerson holds, on the contrary, that the universe, even on its lower plane, the plane of illusion as he would call it, is a masterly moral engine, showing exactness, delicacy, an approach almost to finish, in its operations. "A perfect equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life." [1] He compares it even to a multiplication-table or a mathematical equation.[2] "Its exact value, nor more nor less, still returns." [3] The incentive to right is somewhat weakened by Emerson's previous assertion in the same essay, that pleasure as such is likewise penal; that equality subsists not merely between guilt and penalty, but between pleasure and pain; that innocence, if it presumes to be happy, is to be mulcted no less inexorably than guilt. The dogma is becoming rather involved for a thinker like Emerson who is not in the least partial to complications, but another coil yet is to be added to its intricacies. The merely pleasurable compensation does not hold in the real world, the sphere of reason; there are no drawbacks to pure wisdom, no tolls on absolute virtue. "The soul is," and its fastness is inviolable.[4]

We face these propositions with astonishment. Is this

[1] "Compensation," II, 102.
[2] "Compensation," II, 102.
[3] "Compensation," II, 102.
[4] "Compensation," II, 120–21.

workmanlike, this shipshape, this water-tight cosmos really the lounging, slovenly, ungirt universe to which our sorrier fortune or weaker insight has accustomed us? The assertion is hard to believe. "Compensation" is, nevertheless, a noble essay, in spite of its vain attribution of an imaginary precision to the moral teaching of the universe, because it brings out with unequaled vividness a true and weighty principle, the principle of reaction, reflux, the correction of extremes.

XIV. Flux

Emerson saw precision in the universe (not the same thing by any means as seeing the universe precisely) and a hasty reader might conclude that the cosmos was rigid in his eyes. In point of fact, his cosmos was superlatively flexible. The word "flexible," indeed, is too weak. For "flexible" write "plastic," and for "plastic" write "fluid," and we shall approximate the interesting truth. Emerson's world was in flux, as a few specifications will show us.

"There are no fixtures in nature," he cries. "The universe is fluid and volatile." [1] The dullard sees that water, that air, is fluid. Emerson sees the same property in granite, as he suggests in "Circles" [2] and in "Fate." "Every solid in the universe is ready to become fluid." [3]

The dull man discerns the flux of life in the passage of the generations. Emerson saw the flux of species, when that thought was still the property of the wise few,

[1] "Circles," II, 302.
[2] "Circles," II, 302–03.
[3] "Fate," VI, 43.

and told how the worm striving to be man, mounted "through all the spires of form."[1]

The common man sees the state, institutions, churches, usages, property, "Rooted like oak-trees to the centre."[2] Emerson felt that "society is fluid." There probably never lived another man on whom the existing frame of society made an impression so vaporous and transitory.

In certain moods persons also yield to the solvent: they "melt" into each other; they are seen as "a fleet of ripples which the wind drives over the surface of the water."[3]

If we enter the mind itself, we encounter a like fluidity. Our interests, our affections even, are swept away in the flux. "We need change of objects."[4] Our powers are fluctuant. "I am God in nature: I am a weed by the wall."[5] Even our convictions, firmly as we may voice them, are not sure. "I am always insincere, as always knowing there are other moods."[6] The most settled determinations of men were pliable, in his view, before the magic of personal ascendency.[7] Even the genius who made the stubborn world plastic held this power by virtue of a new plasticity, the equal fitness to all occasions, the self-adjustment to the untried situation.[8]

If the advance of thought is in question, the language rises to sublimity. "The very hopes of man, the thoughts of his heart, the religion of nations, the manners and morals of mankind are all at the mercy of a

[1] "Poems," IX, 281. [2] "Politics," III, 199.
[3] "Nominalist and Realist," III, 236. [4] "Experience," III, 55.
[5] "Circles," II, 307. [6] "Nominalist and Realist," II, 247.
[7] "Eloquence," VII, 80–81. [8] "Eloquence," VII, 76–77.

new generalization."[1] The inclusion of the word "morals" in the above sentence makes the world reel: *the virtues themselves have joined the flux.*

The divine power is likewise in flux. The one concrete thing, the one *image*, that attaches to the Over-Soul in Emerson's description, is fluidity. By actual count, water furnishes the writer with not less than a dozen comparisons in that essay. The Over-Soul is forever novel, forever different from itself. "Lo! suddenly the great soul has enshrined itself in some other form and done some other deed, and that is now the flower and head of all living nature."[2]

The flux is part of Emerson's own mental operations. Most men need, for instance, a fixed image of God — a fixed concreteness for the unthinking, a fixed abstraction for the wise. For this Emerson would seem to have substituted a rotation of concrete images, the rotation in a sense suggesting and replacing the abstraction. He had a marvellous knack of keeping his footing upon mobile surfaces, as sailors walk steadily on a heaving deck. Most men, to insure their intellectual equilibrium, assign a quite factitious solidity and fixity to the universe; Emerson balanced its agility by his own. The result was that he had access to an order of truth of which the majority of his brethren were organically incapable. Those who wish to measure aright his address and security in the handling of a peculiarly slippery and tantalizing thought are referred to his lecture on "The Method of Nature."[3]

[1] "Circles," II, 308–09. [2] "Spiritual Laws," II, 166.
[3] "Method of Nature," I, 191–224.

XV. Possibility

What limits our expectation of change? Clearly our belief in fixity. Let the world become wax to our hands or to our imaginations, and possibilities that yesterday were dim and remote become all at once vivid and near. The believer in flux becomes therefore the unsurpassed seer of possibilities.

Emerson foresaw, in the material world, the extraction from all substances of the same utility men now derive from iron, wood, and coal.[1] He foresaw, in poetic fashion, the evolutionary theory of the origin of species. His previsions in education were judged by Mr. Cabot to be remarkable.[2] He could prefigure, with Alcott's encouragement, the abolishing of government, the arrival of a day when "thousands of human beings might exercise towards each other the grandest and simplest sentiments as well as a knot of friends, or a pair of lovers."[3] He pictured the time when the railroad, the insurance office, the joint-stock company, should be raised to a divine use, when mechanics should be guided by love.[4] He dreamed of spirit which should make broom and mop holy and venerable.[5] The abandonment by the mass of mankind of such ends as money, power, and fame, impressed him as one of the most credible and natural of possibilities.

He foresaw poets to whom Homer and Milton should be "tin pans."[6] He exposed the fallacy of eclecticism

[1] "Uses of Great Men," IV, 9.
[2] Cabot, II, 614.
[3] "Politics," III, 221.
[4] "Arts," II, 368–69.
[5] "Spiritual Laws," II, 165–66.
[6] "Poetry and Imagination," VIII, 68.

which claimed that philosophy, becoming inclusive, might so become permanent.[1] In "Circles" he pictures the final truth as indefinitely recessive, as lastingly inaccessible, and saw its temporary housings vanish after each other and into each other.[2] He saw new virtues superseding and surpassing the old.[3]

The faith of Emerson included even himself, even the present moment. The reported outbreak of poetry in one of his mates at college threw him into delicious palpitations.[4] His hope of a roadside Messiah made him divinely patient with those wayworn saviors of the universe, his "poor" as he affectionately called them, to whom his sympathy was alms.[5] He entered into intimate conversation with the feelings that might have stirred a new participant in hieratic or Eleusinian mysteries. In every orator he surmised a Pentecost.

This rare power to make high possibilities clear and near rested on two perfectly definable propositions: First, the absolute dependence of all things on the state of the human spirit; second, the power of that spirit to make instant, unlimited, and what he called *total* advances.[6] To this air wonders are native. But the word checks us in mid-course: a moment ago we dwelt on the changelessness of law, and our words now border the dialect of miracle.

XVI. Magic

Emerson, indeed, is the avowed patron of what he fearlessly, perhaps a little wilfully, calls magic. "A deep

[1] "Literary Ethics," I, 171–73.
[2] "Circles," II, 301–22.
[3] "Circles," II, 316–17.
[4] "The Poet," III, 10–11.
[5] *E. in C.* 201.
[6] "The Over-Soul," II, 274–75.

man," he says in "Beauty," believes in miracles, waits for them, believes in magic, believes that the orator will decompose his adversary: believes that the evil eye can wither, that the heart's blessing can heal.[1] In "Character" he says: "He is a dull observer whose experience has not taught him the reality and force of magic, as well as of chemistry."[2] Is this mere rhetoric? Apparently Emerson actually believed in predestined meetings,[3] in secret communications of virtue, in bereavements[4] and in discoveries that are providentially timed,[5] in cannon-balls that spare workers but kill lookers-on,[6] in the sure arrival of the fit sound to the apt ear,[7] in the hiding from our eyes all that does not concern us.[8] When he closed "Terminus" with

"And every wave is charmed,"

he was not merely seeking witchery of phrase, but had honestly in mind a witchery not remote from the historical import of the word. His belief in the providential adaptation of the circumstance to the individual need would have gratified his Puritan ancestors. He hated spiritualism, the "rat-and-mouse revelation,"[9] as he bitingly called it, not because it countenanced marvel, but because it discouraged spirituality.

Had Emerson, then, relinquished law in accepting magic? Rather say that for Emerson law was magic. For him wonders that struck his fellow-men as sheer anomalies were readily set down in the large account of

[1] "Beauty," VI, 283.
[2] "Character," III, 110.
[3] "Character," III, 112.
[4] *Jour.* IV, 125.
[5] *Jour.* VIII, 7.
[6] "Worship," VI, 233.
[7] "The Over-Soul," II, 293–94.
[8] "Nominalist and Realist," III, 243.
[9] "Worship," VI, 209.

unascertained or unverified law. The imagination of Emerson saw a depth in law quite invisible to the normal man, who believes that in circumscribing the universe by an inflexible order he has thereby fixed it in the petty hoop of his own makeshift statements of his own meagre knowledge. Emerson's attitude, of course, is open to criticism. There is evident danger in the facile acceptance of beliefs agreeable to our own tempers, in spite of their antagonism, if not to the order of things, at all events to the best current understanding of that order, and Emerson's masterly good sense is conspicuous in his failure to avail himself of the charter to folly implicit in that dubious procedure. The curious point is the reinstatement of the content or substance of extinct superstitions under a quasi-scientific authorization.

XVII. Magnifiers

Returning to our starting-point in the particular experience, let us put to ourselves this question: if omnipotence wished to aggrandize this experience to the highest conceivable point, what measures would it take? Plainly, the experience involves two elements, the perceived object and the perceiver. Let us, then, suppose that each of these factors undergoes an infinite exaltation; let us suppose that the perceived object expands to the dimensions of the cosmos, while the man, the perceiver, dilates to the stature of God. This supposition thus formulated appears like the foam of delirium, the riot of insanity. It is, nevertheless, not far from an accurate description of Emerson's conception of the actual fact.

A glance cannot embrace the universe, but if the universe repeated itself in every particle, a glance might embrace this epitome. By this simple expedient which appears in Emerson under the deceptively humble title of the "Doctrine of the Leasts," room is found for the cosmos within the individual perception. Malpighi is quoted: "Nature exists entire in leasts"; and Swedenborg: "The least forms . . . involve an idea representative of their entire universe." [1] Emerson's version in "The Sphinx" is more poetical: —

> "Thorough a thousand voices
> Spoke the universal dame;
> 'Who telleth one of my meanings
> Is master of all I am.'" [2]

So, likewise, man the perceiver is associated with God. Many thinkers, conceiving Deity as the whole, have conceived men, the parts, to be sharers in Deity. The peculiarity of Emerson lies in the amazing intrepidity with which the attributes, the greatness, the dignity, of the whole are transferred to the part. The divine Law "solicits the pure in heart to draw on *all its omnipotence*" [3] (the italics are ours). "I am God in nature; I am a weed by the wall." [4] "If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice." [5] We may postpone the criticism of these propositions: our aim now is to appreciate their compass.

Adding these two doctrines together, a perception appears to us in an altogether novel light; it is the inos-

[1] "Swedenborg," IV, 114.
[2] *Poems*, IX, 25.
[3] "Fate," VI, 49.
[4] "Circles," II, 307.
[5] "Address," I, 122.

culation of two infinities. Comment is hardly needed. In geometry there is a curve called the hyperbola, which consists of the junction or rather the close approximation of two curves both of which reach back into adverse infinities. That curve might symbolize the Emersonian perception.

XVIII. Rhetoric

There are times when Emerson propounds as solid reality matter which seems hardly more than vivid rhetoric even to sympathetic readers. The two propositions in the foregoing section, particularly the second, may be cited as examples of this disparity.

It is pleasant to be told of "a world in a grain of sand" to use Blake's phrase, but nobody furnishes the specifications; nobody shows us in the sand-grain the tropics and the poles, Asia and the Spice Islands, Sahara and the Pyramids, the Russian steppes and the Champagne vineyards, the ruins of Baalbec and the Thames Tunnel. Even Emerson never is at the pains to show us that a star, a crystal, or a scale is encyclopædic. When we compare the project of discovering the universe in a single particular with the boundless sweep and startling variety of Emerson's own illustration, we are reminded of Macaulay's philosopher who declaimed "in praise of poverty with two millions sterling out at usury."[1]

The assertions of man's identity with God impress the reader as rhetorical in a sense in which that term is not fairly applicable to many of Emerson's daring tropes. We can translate a metaphor, "I tell you that babe is a

[1] Macaulay, *Works*, Riverside ed., II, 438.

thousand years old" [1] into its literal counterpart, "The influences of a thousand years act on that babe through his ancestors"; and it loses vividness, not weight. The expression, "Every man is an inlet into the deeps of Reason," [2] is convertible into: "Man is of one substance with Reason, and communication is unimpeded"; and it is seen at once that the trope merely gives the thought the same value for the imagination which it originally possessed for the intellect. The difficulty of finding literal equivalents for phrases like "I am God in nature," or "If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God," in which substance shall not sink in the same ratio with vivacity is the measure of their debt to exaggeration. When we identify the partial and local manifestation, man, with the absolute and universal essence, God, do we not say in effect that man is somewhat absolute and rather universal? We cannot have degrees in notions whose differentia is the exclusion of degree.

Another form of expression, equally dear to Emerson and equally unconvincing to his readers, is illustrated in the familiar stanza: —

> "I am owner of the sphere,
> Of the seven stars and the solar year,
> Of Cæsar's hand and Plato's brain,
> Of Lord Christ's heart and Shakspeare's strain." [3]

The reader should be grateful for bounties in which he participates, but he hardly warms to the thought of privileges which he shares with the Patagonian and the Dyak. All mankind, of course, are Shakespearian by the same patent as Emerson and himself. Does this resolve itself into anything other or better than the old battered,

[1] "Old Age," VII, 317. [2] "Address," I, 125. [3] *Poems*, IX, 282.

not too heartening fact that he is zoölogically allied to the author of "King Lear" and "As You Like It"? Is the matter cleared up by the intervention of a joint-stock company called the "universal mind" in which he and Shakespeare are both stockholders, but in which the advantage in dividends is so unmistakably on the side of Shakespeare? Granting that his mere status as man is, so to speak, an order on nature for a Hamlet or Macbeth, if in experience only one such order out of a billion is ever honored by nature, must not that circumstance depress the value of the currency? A certain smallness, we fully admit, attaches to the pursuit of Emerson in this fashion, because it is at once so easy and so futile: Emerson is as yielding, and, at the same time, as unyielding, as air or water. Nevertheless, it is well for once to bring out the fact that even sympathetic readers can sometimes find only rhetoric in thoughts that gave him genuine, vivid, and perennial satisfaction.

In another aspect, however, the case is different. This dilation of the object seen and likewise of the perceiver (with the related participation of each man in all men's powers) may be viewed as the forms, wise or unwise, assumed by Emerson's glorification of the unit of consciousness, the solitary experience. Seen in this light, it is doubtful if we have any right to call them either fallacies or hyperboles.

XIX. Over-Soul

It is time to collect and to fill out the hints already noted of that divine force to the worship of which Emerson's life was devoted.

In the names assigned to this power, he was unlucky. In the search for achromatic terms, he chose words that were meagre or anæmic. He rather avoids the word "God" with its teeming polarities: he uses "the soul," which is feeble and, so to speak, unbaked; "the Over-Soul," which externalizes immanence; sometimes he says "Law" or "Necessity" or "Being," which are arid; sometimes "moral sentiment," in which the dryness of the adjective offsets the moisture in the noun, with a general effect of pale neutrality. The pronoun is characteristically "it" — a rebound perhaps from the "Him" and "He" of orthodox typography.

The idea is central in Emerson, but centres are prone to be invisible, and the concept, when stripped of metaphor, is curiously featureless. From "The Over-Soul," which professes to be explanatory, we get one sentence which, for pure enlightenment, outranks all the rest of the essay: "When it breathes through his [man's] intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through his will, it is virtue; when it flows through his affection, it is love."[1] For the rest, the impression we get is vast and fluid — oceanic, in short; with men as arms or inlets of the sea. It will be noticed that even, in this brief summary, we slide into metaphor; so indigent is the abstract idea.

Let us here recall that for the fixed concrete image of the idolater and the fixed abstract image of the metaphysician, Emerson substituted a rotation of concrete images. It seems probable that while the unity that underlay and cemented the manifestations was the object of his day-long and life-long worship, that unity in

[1] "The Over-Soul," II, 271.

its abstract form, in its severance from manifestation, he scarcely cared to see. For Emerson, it will be remembered, every experience was a manifestation: the absence of a fixed idea, therefore, did not act as a break on the continuity of worship.

The incomparable plenitude of forms, the incomparable capacity for seizing the abstraction through the form, the incapacity of seizing it without the form, — these traits individualize Emerson.

The greatness of Plato he thought to consist in the combination in that man's brain of "the unity of Asia and the detail of Europe," [1] the One and the Many, the East loving infinity and the West delighting in boundaries.[2] Take this same Asia and reconcile it again with Europe, not Plato's Europe, but Europe moved ninety-five degrees deeper into the Occident and twenty-two hundred years further into the depth of time, and you reach Emerson. Assuming Emerson's view of Plato to be correct (its exactness has been questioned), we may vary our statement by affirming that the interest in all things as subsidiary to the interest in the one thing is the distinguishing feature of both minds.

In the light of the solidarity or continuity of man and God, the doctrines of flux and of magic acquire fresh clearness and novel meaning. Nature and society are absolutely and instantly dominated by the changes in man's mind; but man's mind can draw on the whole power of God. Through the human spirit, therefore, the full might of divinity can be brought to bear almost instantly upon the forms of matter and society. Hence

[1] "Plato," IV, 53. [2] "Plato," IV, 52.

that sense of the continuous nearness of vast possibilities which almost gave back to Emerson the faith in miracle.

The divine power is universally active, but its characteristic is a perpetual novelty. It refuses the tried path, the old form. An infinite variety which age cannot wither nor custom stale is its elusive and captivating prerogative. At this point the doctrine of self-reliance, viewed by us formerly in its pedestrian or instrumental aspect, assumes at a stroke new interest and dignity. If difference be the mark and the measure of the presence of divinity, self-reliance, which is the expression of that difference, is the removal of the barrier to the influx of God into the heart. Self-reliance is no longer a mere empirical discovery: it stands out in beautiful fitness and certainty as an integral necessity in the Emersonian scheme, and only the opponents of that scheme retain the right to question its validity. Dr. Emerson is happy in the suggestion that "The Over-Soul" is the natural corrective to "Self-Reliance." [1] The word "self" is the unfortunate choice of a man who is anxious to avoid religious language in the enunciation of a religious truth. For Emerson the "self," in the conventional sense, hardly exists: there is the other man in the largest sense (society, institutions, custom), and there is God; a man obeys one or the other, and the substitution of the second dependence for the first is what is known by the misleading and paradoxical name of "self-reliance."

At this point, a solid advantage is gained in the perfect reconcilement of two favorite theses of Emerson

[1] *Works*, II, 390.

which a surface view declares to be contradictory: the thesis that all good lies in self-trust, independence, defiance of the world, and the thesis that all good lies in self-surrender, abandonment, the subjugation of the individual by the universal. Hence the supposed arrogance and the real humility.

XX. Identity

What will happen when these three factors unite: first, an extraordinarily wide and various aggregate of perceptions and thoughts; second, a profound sense of the oneness of all things; third, a passionate and eager delight in the detection of resemblance? There will result a religion which shall be also an occupation and an entertainment, and a philosophy in which identity shall be exalted. No man ever breathed, possibly, who found more pleasure than Emerson in the disclosure of hidden likeness, and this, because no man living was ever more sensitive to the pungency of surface difference. We can do no justice to identity by remembering it all the time: we can appreciate its force only by alternately forgetting and recalling it. It was the vividness of the *cognition* in Emerson, the interest in countless particulars for their own sake, that gave dramatic incisiveness and unrivalled force to the ensuing *recognition*. To the apostle of the single experience, process was far more stirring than result, and, in the leap from one thought to its cognate, he attained perhaps his deepest realization of the unfathomed significance of nature. His progress seemed to follow, not the *radius*, but the *chord;* in plainer language, he did not so much reach the centre by actual

passage from the circumference as he felt or assumed it in his movements from one point in the circumference to another. The tracking of a fact or idea through its multiplying disguises became the keenest of intellectual pleasures: it combined the solemnity of worship with the zest of sport.

XXI. Parallelism

Of these likenesses, one is preëminent. It has been tersely and beautifully put in his first work: "The whole of nature is a metaphor of the human mind." [1] Or, again, in homelier phrase in the lecture on Montaigne: "Every fact is related on one side to sensation, and on the other to morals. . . . Life is a pitching of this penny, — heads or tails." [2] The interest of this thought for Emerson is inexhaustible. He makes language, that is, the furnishing of types or symbols, one of the prime ends of nature.[3] He sometimes defines the poet as nothing more than the interpreter of this coincidence.[4] Man is interesting because of his citizenship in both worlds.

Emerson's sanity showed itself in the avoidance of the customary indiscretion of the holders of this faith, — the attempt to compile a lexicon of the material world in terms of the spiritual. An English-French dictionary is a feasible undertaking, because the French equivalents of an English word are limited, few, and definable. A lexicon of matter in terms of spirit such as Swedenborg and (presumably) Schelling favored, is chimerical because the meanings of any one natural fact are num-

[1] "Nature," I, 32.
[2] "Montaigne," IV, 149.
[3] "Nature," I, 25–35.
[4] "The Poet," III, 13–21.

berless and unascertainable. As Emerson pithily says: "In the transmission of the heavenly waters, every hose fits every hydrant." [1] We have again the rejection of finalities, the disclaiming of the accepted theory that a mind is to accumulate and to find limits in its accumulations as a river makes deposits into banks. The singleness, the totality, of the direct experience is primary. You shall have your full liberty now and here, but you shall not bind to-morrow, you who so gayly shook off the fetters of yesterday. Hence while the *general relation* between matter and spirit is *absolute*, the *particular connections* are more or less *occasional;* and the harvest is not science but poetry.

XXII. Idealism

Was Emerson an idealist? A distinction is imperative. In the sense of a disbeliever in the actuality of matter, Emerson was no convinced or committed idealist. In the sense of one who maintains the absolute dependence of sense-impressions on character and intelligence, he was perhaps the most sweeping, the most fearless, the most insistent idealist that ever lived. He liked matter, and its conversion into pure spirit would perhaps have affected him as unpleasantly as the proposal to convert a tried and faithful dog into a human being. He says himself: "It is a small and mean thing to attempt to disprove the being of matter. I have no hostility to oxygen or hydrogen, to the sun, or the hyacinth that opened this morning its little censer in his beam." [2] This leaves an opening for matter, at least in the form of hyacinths.

[1] "Swedenborg," IV, 121. [2] *Jour.* IV, 82.

In some other ways, nevertheless, the position of Emerson is ultra-idealistic. The strict idealist must admit that the mountain on the horizon is a mental image, but he is quite free to believe, if he so chooses, that the image is the same for the blockhead and the philosopher, for the bandit and the saint. Emerson vests the control of this image in character, in intelligence, and he is tireless in descanting on the fulness and precision of this authority. To abolish matter is needless; its enslavement will suffice. In the chapter on "Idealism" in "Nature," poetry, philosophy, metaphysics, religion, even the eyes themselves of which a sterner probity might have been expected, are shown to be all alike in their inclination to take liberties with matter.[1] So in other fields. In the questions of influence *versus* character, of reputation *versus* merit, the ascendant is with the inner or subjective factor. Still more impressive is the assertion that the whole environment of life — even the events of life — are an efflux of consciousness. "Each creature puts forth from itself its own condition and sphere." [2] "The event fits you like your skin." [3] So, in society, the institutions and customs, which seem embedded in nature, are the consequence and the copy of a state of mind.

XXIII. Society

On the word "society" we pause. Given a corrupt social order; given, in a thoughtful spectator of that order, a superhuman moral code, a dauntless courage, a view of the flux of institutions, a belief in high and rapid possibilities: and a great reformer seems inevit-

[1] "Nature," I, 47–60. [2] "Fate," VI, 41. [3] "Fate," VI, 40.

able. That Emerson failed to be quite that or just that is a fact that calls for brief elucidation.

Emerson's sense of social evil was keen and multifarious; its multifariousness decreased its intensity. A humane man, hearing one cry of agony, rushes eagerly to the aid of the sufferer; hearing twelve cries at the same time, he is constrained by humanity itself to pause, to consider, to postpone, to put on a temporary stoicism. Emerson saw wrong in slavery, but he saw wrong in property, wrong in trade, wrong in drunkenness, wrong in household service. His perception of identity revealed the same evil in a series or terrace of forms. You rebuke slavery, but to be idle and to leave hard work to menials is slave-holding in substance or in nascence.[1] You refuse to buy molasses made by slaves, but the gold-piece you accept was the price of that molasses.[2] (The reader will note with the proper surprise that these points are not only arguments, but arguments based on *consistency*.) For Emerson the totality of the evil demonstrated and derided the partiality of the reform.

When the rogue pays his grocer as a pledge of reformation, we test his sincerity by asking whether he has paid his tailor and his butcher likewise. Abolition is one debt to the ideal. If your motives are pure, that purity will appear in an equal zeal for the discharge of other obligations. But abolition, as Emerson sees it, narrows its defenders: they are fortunate if they escape unembittered from its influence.

Institutions are the shadows of thought, and the

[1] Cabot, II, 424–25. [2] *Jour.* VI, 360.

property of a shadow is to respond instantly to the slightest change in the generating object but to be impervious to any form of action brought to bear upon itself. The thing that counts is the thought of persons — not exactly that vulgar amalgam known as public opinion which is formed by the running together and coalescence of the gluey elements in human nature — but rather the sum of countless intimate and insular experiences on the part of solitary individuals. If an institution, slavery for example, rests on a state of mind in slave and in owner, that state of mind remaining unchanged, it has roots in the order of the universe and is inexpugnable. Hence came that aloofness and impassivity which for many years qualified and partly paralyzed his sincere disapprobation of slavery. The same principle explains his later incandescence. Slavery might be fit for Carolina, but its unfitness for Massachusetts was evident, and the imposition by force of a low order of conduct upon a relatively high phase of consciousness made the Anti-Slavery Law of 1850 the object of Emerson's most scorching anathemas. To make men better by statute may be hopeless; to make them *worse* by statute is imbecile and infamous at once.

Emerson believed that reform should start from the centre; but that centre was not Washington. The capital of the United States had its site in the heart of the individual. Changes from that quarter only could be valid and lasting, and he was authorized by his "magic" to believe that changes so originated would diffuse their effects, without means and without delay, to the outskirts of the environing community. The avenue to

public reform is self-culture, and in the preference of that route, Emerson's constitution seconded his philosophy. His power to adopt the more orthodox method at the command of duty has been amply demonstrated in the preceding narrative.

XXIV. Government

One point must be briefly restated at this juncture, because it marks the crest of Emerson's individualism. He believed that when an issue arose between government and the individual conscience, the conscience was paramount. But he went farther than this: he believed that the enforcement by government of a course *approved* by the individual was an affront to the dignity of the private conscience. He was, in brief, a peaceful and moral anarchist, and government was to him what the birch is in our day to humane parents or the rod to advanced educators, a discredited and obsolescent makeshift. One sentence will suggest the tenor of his teaching: "I do not call to mind a single human being who has steadily denied the authority of the laws, on the simple ground of his own moral nature." [1]

XXV. Evil

The proposition to abolish the police is outrageous to the average man. It is bound up, however, with the world's prime quarrel with Emerson — his unconcern in the face of evil.

Evil is divisible into pain and wrong, and Emerson's offence varies in the two divisions. He underrates the

[1] "Politics," III, 221.

amount of pain, it is said, and he underrates the *importance* of wrong. In view of the scope and sharpness of his strictures on mankind, it is doubtful whether he measured too leniently the deviation of actuality from standard in the field of ethics. It would be more exact to say that he overrated the *preponderance* of good.

Let us now try to understand the Emersonian undervaluing of pain. Three classes of men emphasize suffering: first, the happy but imaginative and sympathetic person whose bugaboos are uncorrected by experience; second, the cowardly sufferer who magnifies the suffering to excuse the cowardice; third, the brave sufferer who magnifies the pain to augment the bravery. But if a man had been taught in childhood to bear and to despise pain, to face poverty (with the imminence at least of hunger and cold), with the scornful negligence of a mind forearmed because preoccupied, he might come to think so lightly of suffering that gayety would become for him the badge of heroism. Give him a doctrine of compensation which shall equate pleasure and pain, a doctrine of illusion which shall relegate bodily suffering to the sphere of the unreal, and his growth in unconcern becomes intelligible. We have in Emerson the forestalment of pain by stronger interests: he shared the indifference of the lover who has wounded himself on the spikes of the wall which he has overleaped to find his mistress.

What examples of suffering would press such an estimate hardest? The fagot, perhaps, and the slave-ship. It is curious that Emerson has passed his theory through the ordeal of these stringent examples, and that it

emerges, by his own showing, unscathed from the test. The torments of the martyrs, he observes tranquilly, are "illusory." [1] Throughout life his sympathy for bodily pain, though not wanting, had strict limits, and he forgave crime more readily than the recital of distempers.

To pass to the second topic. To lighten pain is to reduce guilt, since wrong is obnoxious largely as the cause of pain. Now the temper of our own day sympathizes with the diminution of the *solemnity*, of what might be called the inverted sanctity, of wrong. The best spirits, however, find something profane and libertine in the attenuation of the *weight* of evil-doing.

It is worth remarking at the outset that the theory of benign omnipotence demands the abolition of evil. The most illogical of men, by the general consensus of his fellows, finds himself in the curious situation of defending a logical position against the almost unanimous protest of all other theists.

Present-day thinkers would largely concur in the abstract dogma that evil is merely the absence of good, as cold is of heat. The incentive or positive element in honest and dishonest acquisition, in lawful and unlawful sexuality, seems so clearly one and the same that one leans to the conclusion that the moral differentia in the two cases resides in the absence of a check. Fire or sex may destroy, but if fire plus care and intelligence, if sex plus justice and love, becomes wholly beneficial, a difficulty which an addition, a contribution, can remove seems properly classed as negative. But it may be plausibly urged that the distinction has no force in practice.

[1] "Courage," VII, 265.

The discovery that cold is the absence of heat has not diminished the vogue of sables in the Russian winter, nor, according to the best latter-day advices, driven American fuel-dealers into bankruptcy. Does the theory that evil is the absence of good lessen the stringency of the moral conflict?

The mere theory, let us instantly confess, is powerless, but the state of mind that begot it is another matter. To pursue our former figure, the exertions and precautions which would be wise at the Arctic Circle may be idiotic at the Tropic of Cancer. What Emerson represents is a difference of climate; his philosophy is the native of a warmer zone, where an exposure that would be rashness in higher latitudes is rational and discreet. On study, his depreciation of wrong, of guilt, becomes intelligible. On the one hand, it is the logical outcome of his philosophy, his faith in an all-powerful benevolence, his belief in the perfection of the cosmos as a moral mechanism, and his reliance on the instincts of the individual; on the other, it is the flower of a happy private experience in which the absence of low ends and strong passions had calmed the violence and abated the rigors of the moral conflict. The adoption of this view as a standard by men of other and harsher experience is no more to be urged by the discriminating than its dismissal as a dream or illusion is to be sanctioned by the wise. Nobody views the matter in the right light; nobody has done justice to this enlightening and enheartening possibility that a life, superlatively observant and far from wholly solitary or wholly inactive, should have been passed, without hurt to probity, under a greatly diminished sense

of the calamitous and iniquitous sides of existence. People think of Emerson's view as constitutional; as if our view, the view of the millions, were not likewise constitutional, and as if, constitution for constitution, the preference belonged to us.

XXVI. Moralists

The high moralists may be ranged in two classes. There are men in whom the law, the sense of duty or obligation, the feeling of responsibility, is developed to a point which threatens the maintenance of a due emphasis on love and the humane virtues. There are souls, on the contrary, in whom the supreme interest of love in the Christian sense leads to a subordination, perhaps an underestimate, of the claims of bare law on human observance. If we now ask ourselves to which of these two natural biases the first of American moralists yielded himself, the answer is a surprise: he laid no special, no distinguished, emphasis on either.

XXVII. Duty

Emerson faced in his career unpalatable obligations, every one of which, so far as we know, he punctiliously discharged; the difficulties they offered, however, do not seem to have tinged his view of life. He could write nobly on duty when he chose, and one of his best known and best loved quatrains closes with the exalting lines: —

> "When Duty whispers low, *Thou must*,
> The youth replies, I can." [1]

[1] *Poems*, IX, 207.

Still, for a specialist in morals, Emerson's handlings of the theme are unquestionably few. The alertness of critics has even discovered that he wanted conscience,[1] — a fact that had escaped the observation of his family, his townsfolk, his servants, and his creditors. He practised virtue, indeed, with a quite inexcusable readiness. One might forgive the man his goodness, though even that was of an immoderate and unbridled kind, but his effrontery in doing right without contortions is not to be condoned.

Conscience and duty measure and traverse the interval between desire and right, and as this interval gradually narrows, the storage of energy for the leaping of the chasm will decline like other superfluities. One cannot expect the conscription bureau to retain its importance in the face of the increasing enlistment of volunteers, and it is futile to take fright at the reduction of the police force when the cause of the retrenchment is the decay of crime. True, many men are still helped by self-coercion, but Emerson never depreciated nor discouraged the fulfilment of duty; he simply refused to add either the lustre or the onus of sacrifice to acts which wore for him the aspect of privilege.

XXVIII. Love

The treatment of duty is frugal. Is he copious, by the law of contraries, on the theme of love? Of love in the Christian sense, that sentiment which embraces all mankind in a bond which takes its form and color from the fraternal and domestic rather than the strictly sexual

[1] "H. James, Sr.," in Brownell, *American Prose Masters*, 175.

emotions, Emerson speaks neither charily nor lavishly. The essay on "Love," which is half sexual, half philosophic, may be said both to underlie and to overlie this sentiment, but hardly to include it in the strict sense. Beautiful passages, more directly to the point, can be culled from the essays with just that quantum of search which proves that they are not fully or markedly characteristic. There is one in "Compensation":[1] there is another in "Heroism." "The love that will be annihilated sooner than treacherous has already made death impossible, and affirms itself no mortal but a native of the deeps of absolute and inextinguishable being."[2]

The light touch on love should be viewed in two relations. It marks, in one view, the magnitude of love, a foregone, an axiomatic magnitude: the need of breathing and the need of food are touched with significant lightness in treatises on physiology. In the next place, while in practice Emerson laid all the needful stress on the friendly offices of social life, his conception of love lacked domesticity, lacked neighborliness, in a remarkable degree. By a series of expansions and rarefactions, love passed from men to mankind, from mankind to humanity, from humanity to divinity, until at last it became hardly distinguishable from his love of virtue, truth, and beauty. Plato counted the rungs of that celestial ladder in the "Phædrus" and the "Symposium." For "disinterested" or "benevolent" Emerson often used a singular synonym, original perhaps with him, typical at all events of his wish to desiccate his vocabulary on a subject which liquefies the diction of most men. The syno-

[1] "Compensation," II, 123–24. [2] "Heroism," II, 264.

nym is "public." His devotion was not checked by the impersonality of its object. Many men can die for their families, many for their country, a few for mankind; Emerson could have died for the universe. We may sum up the position by saying that the word "love" is a little too warm, too substantial, too personal to be his *favorite* term for the expression of this loyalty.

XXIX. Virtues

The noblest of moralists talks rarely of duty, not too frequently of love. Are we to understand, then, that he dilates on the particular virtues? The reply to this query is suggestive.

Let it be borne in mind that Emerson found leisure to write two essays on art, two essays on manners (the second entitled "Behavior"), an essay on politics, an essay on wealth, an essay on farming, and an essay on the superlative. It is interesting to observe that a moralist so excursive has written no essay on justice, none on temperance, none on chastity, none on good temper, none on veracity (except the "Truth" in "English Traits"), none on humility, none on faithfulness. The list of virtues actually handled is peculiar; there is one essay on heroism, another on courage, a third on a trait so subsidiary as prudence, a fourth and a fifth on the honorary or associate virtues of self-reliance and love. It cannot even be said that he is at all liberal even of paragraphs devoted to the elucidation or enforcement of other virtues. How shall we reconcile these facts with the prevailing impression of his devotion to ethics, with the identification of morality with God himself in pas-

sages like the following: "Men talk of 'mere morality' — which is much as if one should say, 'Poor God, with nobody to help him?'" [1]

He slights virtues because he worships morality, — that is a good part of the explanation. Virtues are to him an adaptation of the divine principle to special, immediate needs, a translation of the pure text into a rough vernacular for the benefit of the half-cultivated. A virtue is a line drawn from God to man: its junction with man is the point that affects men in general: Emerson is interested in its junction with God. In this meeting-place the virtues coalesce. We have already quoted the passage in which he refers to the "descent and accommodation felt when we leave speaking of moral nature to urge a virtue which it enjoins." [2] Since the virtues have one terminus in man, whose circumstances and requirements are in flux, their forms, as we know them, are transitive and provisional.[3] It is quite possible that the major virtues of to-day, justice, faithfulness, chastity, and benevolence, may come in time to hold the subordinate part now occupied by such merits as industry, caution, and thrift. The high qualities, justice, temperance, truth, are too abstract for most men: for Emerson they were too concrete. With his sure footing on slippery surfaces, he resolves virtue into a tendency, a direction, the final object of which is deity.

Once more the commanding position of self-reliance in the moral life rises before us in new clearness. Self-reliance establishes that relation to God which is the sole

[1] "Worship," VI, 215.
[2] "The Over-Soul," II, 275.
[3] "Circles," II, 314–17.

ground of worth in particular virtues. The virtues are specific conformities to the will of an acknowledged sovereign: self-reliance is the oath of fealty, so to speak, which makes us liegemen and vassals of that power.

XXX. Insecurity

A parenthesis may be inserted at this point. Without any weakening of practice or even of standard in its mere prescriptions for conduct, without any hurt to the beneficence of a high example and a noble spirit, Emerson admitted into the metaphysics, into the philosophic basis, of morality certain tenets not without peril to the consciences of smaller men. No less than four of these disintegrative elements can be specified: —

First, the admission that acts vary with motives to an extent that renders the basest act in certain junctures commendable.[1]

Second, the doctrine, already discussed, that evil is purely negative.[2]

Third, the belief that the intellect knows no evil;[3] in other words, that a whole range of experience subsists where moral distinctions are inoperative.

Fourth, an increasing sense of the *virtus* in the *vis*, of the rights of health and energy, of the righteousness in constitution. On this topic, barely touched hitherto, a word of explanation is required.

Emerson's constitutional infirmity admired its opposite — instinctive force. He did not pity victims overmuch; his indifference to pain fostered equanimity, and

[1] "Circles," II, 316–17.
[2] "Address," I, 124.
[3] "Experience," III, 79.

he left the bill to be paid by the indefatigable "Compensation." The universe could protect itself, and the spectacle of unhampered power was exhilarating. As the world was one, even the force that showed itself in ruthlessness could be traced back to the author of compassion. The result was a singular leniency to the cruelties and injustices that accompanied power and impulse. The vigorous arraignment of Bonaparte at the close of the "Napoleon" is less impressive than the essayist's capacity to forget his crimes in the delighted contemplation of his energy. In "Power," he speaks with admiration rather than lenity of "rough riders," of "legislators in shirt sleeves . . . half orator, half assassin," [1] of the "strong transgressor," of "Lynch law," of "soldiers and pirates," of "bruisers," [2] and pens a not unsympathetic character-sketch of a man who "united in his person the functions of bully, incendiary, swindler, barkeeper, and burglar." [3]

To Emerson, be it remembered, immoral power and virtue are the respective stages, lower and higher, of a single cosmic movement. The strong good man was the lineal heir of the strong bad man; the weakling, good or bad, was a cringing bastard of the stock. Power was uneducated virtue: virtue was power plus sight. He saw in the Christopher who served the devil gallantly the future servant of the Son of Man.

The four opinions noted above had no effect on the soundness of Emerson's private morals. He had his own defences. He joggled the row-boat recklessly because

[1] "Power," VI, 63.
[2] "Power," VI, 64.
[3] "Power," VI, 67.

he knew that he could swim. He forgot, perhaps, that he had fellow-passengers.

XXXI. Conclusion

We return to the argument which our parenthesis suspended. Some pages back we affirmed that, from Emerson's point of view, action as a spur to thought was invaluable; action as the carriage of thought into matter or into the social organism is an affair of small consequence. What applies to action in general applies no less to the special province of ethical conduct. When virtue has achieved the mastery of the will, its task is substantially complete. Effects are indifferent — let us even say ineffectual. If the sacrifice, if the service, be genuinely willed, frustration is unimportant, or, in essence perhaps, impossible. "Has it not occurred to you that you have no right to go, unless you are equally willing to be prevented from going?" [1] Do you fear that society will fail of the needed renovation? There is no society. Out there in the dim externality there are self-centred insular states of mind like your own, and your loyalty is their welfare. The phantasm you call society will reflect instantly in clear ameliorations any rise in the moral level of individuals.

Life is subjective: life is internal. Receptiveness is the normal and happy state, and conduct is instrumental to reception. Conduct, indeed, coincides pretty closely both in substance and in sound with a French derivative of the self-same etymology, "conduit." It is a pipe discharging old material that new material may have li-

[1] "The Over-Soul," II, 293.

cense to enter; when transmission stops, reception ceases. Is this life egotistic? The ego is a frontier dividing one tiny section of the universal life from the whole, and the mark of the state of mind we seek is the obliteration of that frontier. Is the life selfish? Solitary it may indeed be called, but its solitude rejoices in the discernment of the welfare of the whole.

The relation of the doctrines expounded in the foregoing sections to the particular experience may be briefly pointed out. If the single experience is to be uniformly exalted, the universe must be cleared of evil; the grossest act or heaviest calamity must be viewed as the stammering of the divine power in its first untrained efforts to articulate. Love, also, must be removed from individuals and concentrated on universal powers, if its riches are to be continuously available as the ornament and sustenance of life. So, again, with the virtues. To give the moment its acme of exaltation, virtue must be viewed not in its special or partial aspect as justice, benevolence, or fortitude, but in its supreme and pervasive aspect as the outcome and expression of the divine mind. The whole philosophy contributes to the ascension and irradiation of the moment.

CHAPTER VIII

FORESHADOWINGS

It is admitted on all hands that Emerson represents an extraordinary intellectual and moral development. That an extraordinary intellectual and moral development would almost necessarily readjust one's scale of values is a proposition that virtually everybody would concede. We have, then, in Emerson's *superiority* an adequate and available explanation for his *difference from ourselves*, but with curious and amusing unanimity everybody rejects this account of the matter, and assumes that Emerson's departures or divergences are aberrations. If a man finds the universe not quite so ugly as it appears to most of us, the purblind can see that his vision is defective.

We wish to suggest in this concluding chapter the possibility that Emerson was a synthesis and an anticipation — an anticipation because he was a synthesis. We do not pretend to be able to prove the actuality of this proposition; we do not even claim access to any inward oracle which guarantees its accuracy for ourselves. Mere possibilities, however, are often worth looking at. Progress springs largely out of the synthesis in the individual of traits or tendencies that in cruder periods had to find a lodgment in distinct and divergent personalities. The world grows when strength and virtue, muscle and brain, courage and prudence, liberality and piety, lib-

erty and law, become capable of circumscription within the rim of a single personality. We wish to suggest that a larger arc of the great hoop which we call the universe found accommodation in the soul of Emerson than in that of almost any other known denizen of the planet.

Let us glance, for instance, at the three great desiderata of enlightened man, truth, beauty, and goodness with its companion and support, religion. Men differ as to the relative worth of these aims. It seems clear, that if equality be impossible, that one of the three is entitled to the ascendant whose supremacy will least compromise and obstruct the free development of the two others. Now Emerson, in so far as he made a distinction, put religion and ethics first, but by making both intellectualism and beauty the feeders or commissaries to religion and its ally, he made the higher power security for the expansion and ascent of its subordinates. Artists, and perhaps intellectualists, will complain of Emerson's religious bias. But, after all, has he not made the best division of honor and authority hitherto known among the three great claimants to the allegiance of mankind? Does not his system offer far more scope and countenance to the sentiment of beauty than the system of Théophile Gautier or Walter Pater, for example, offers to the religious and moral sense? Does it not encourage intellectualism far more zealously and effectively than the systems of Francis Bacon and Herbert Spencer encourage piety? The very results are eloquent. Not every devotee of art has added equally to the world's store of beauty, and how many idolaters of mind can we count whose contributions to thought would not be

laughable beside those of this champion of the almightiness of virtue? Is not Emerson's method on the whole the most pertinent suggestion that has been offered in modern times to aid the world in its ultimate grapple with the problem of the comparative worthiness of these forces? The headship granted to religion may impress certain minds as puritanic and provincial, and its justice cannot be summarily proved. Still in an age of widening generalization and mellowing sentiment, it seems far from impossible that the reverential and affectionate study of the supreme generality may become the ultimate business of mankind.

Two impulses have divided the world in the choice between secularity and religion. The East, as Emerson has explained in his "Plato," wanted religion so much that it was content, at great loss to itself, to be solitary, contemplative, self-effacing. The West loved the active, the varied, the liberal, the self-evocative, and these ends committed it to the culture of secularity. Plato may have spanned the chasm for his own day, but with the advance of centuries the bridge has weakened and the chasm has enlarged. Where but in Emerson can we find a reverence for the solitary vision which exceeds that of the ascetic and devotee united with an esteem for the varied, palpable, objective fact, which the investigator or commercialist might recognize as adequate? The balance between the two opposite tendencies is preserved by the restoration to every object as symbol of the value which it has lost as actuality. The soul, like the rivers that make deltas, pursues its way through many and divergent channels, but all these serve no

other purpose than to widen and to diversify its eventual reunion with the sea. To speak without metaphor, the problem that grows out of the fact that religion is special while life is universal is solved by the discovery that the specialty is coextensive with the universe.

There is another profound difficulty or contradiction which the champion of religion in our time must face. Religion is an attempt at fixation; it emphasizes the abiding, the unchangeable; the mark of the God, even in the crude faith, is immortality. So strong is this predilection that the belief in God has conferred permanence or the shadow of permanence on things really external to itself, on vast aggregates of improbable fiction called myths, and still larger accumulations of baseless or laughable casuistry called theologies. But the fleetingness and uncertainty of things is an aspect of the cosmos which is felt in the earliest days by the least heedful observer and which the vogue of the historical method and the acceptance of the theory of evolution have brought into new prominence in modern times. The waters have been let loose; the once solid and steadfast universe has become a flux of restlessly changing waves, and the spirit of man, like the dove in the Noachian deluge, flutters homelessly above the expanse of unbroken waters, finding no rest for the sole of its foot. The fluidity is twofold, marking both the fact itself and our view of the fact; we survey a running train from the vantage-ground of a moving automobile; we live amid changing estimates of changing things.

The effect of these powerful influences is seen in the attitudes of eclecticism, of agnosticism, of scepticism, of

relativity, attitudes which sometimes appear to govern minds in the measure of their range, their modernity, and their insight. An ample and generous recognition of this transiency and slipperiness both in the nature of things and in man's soul seems more and more a necessary ingredient in any estimate of the universe which shall satisfy the intellect of the coming man. But it seems equally true that the coming man who shall resolve our problems will never content himself with a universe a-tilt, a universe in cascade, so to speak; the craving for permanence in some form cannot be jauntily evaded. Is there any known mind which foreshadows the desired combination so clearly as Emerson's? Who has felt more profoundly the evanescence and evasiveness of things? He not only admits the fact cordially; he triumphs in the instability of the universe. In this endless novelty, this perpetual flux, he finds the authentic evidence of the divine power; as in the Gospel narrative the god is revealed by his power to tread the waves. The life of religion is proved by its transformations, and scepticism, as the agent or condition of these vitalizing changes, is its generous and beneficent support. Yet Emerson was quite as firm in his insistence on a single unalterable reality as in his refusal to believe that any aspect or estimate of that reality could be final. Few men, it is true, are now capable of so delicate a reconcilement of permanence with elasticity. But the world is still immature, and, the rarer the combination, the more precious is the demonstration of its possibility.

Emerson's attitude toward pain has been the subject of much adverse comment from a world indisposed to

give up the solace of exploiting its own sufferings. There has been, to many men, something wilful, almost insolent, in this indifference to the pests of life, as if one should whistle blithely in his shirt-sleeves in a morning when everybody else was shivering in his furs. But is it not conceivable that even this attitude may be prophetic? Is it not possible that preoccupation with intellectual and moral interests might reach a point which should reduce, or possibly remove, the significance of pain, and may not the prelude, the promise, of that happy transformation be legible in the attitude of Emerson? The values we give to physical pain and pleasure, for instance, are commonly settled in infancy, when, in the absence of higher competitors, they appropriated the whole field. They thus acquired a strong prescriptive advantage, and when they appear in any strength in competition with psychical values, our instinct is to allow them the right of way. Is this allowance necessary, or is it a mere habit which the institution of a counter-habit could displace? Emerson has served his race by affording in his life and speech a genuine support to the latter alternative. The key-word, in his case, is not so much heroism, though his equipment of heroism was ample, as preoccupation. The bodily sensation found itself anticipated. It is easy to call this point of view fantastic or peculiar. But is it well to leave out of our review of possibilities the supposition that the present exception may become the future norm of the emancipated race, that the anæsthetics in the moral world may be intelligence and virtue?

There is still another critical point in which Emerson

displays an inclusiveness which may prefigure the reconciling efficacy of the future. The universe loves power; in its earlier evolution it loves nothing else; in the animal world, it visits weakness with the penalties of crime, and distributes recompense and success on principles which would to-day brand a nation as barbarous or a man as criminal. Yet, singularly enough, in the very act of obeying, almost of lackeying, power, it begets and fosters other objects between which and its earlier aim the opposition is implacable. It upholds and glorifies violence, yet nothing can dissuade it from the negligent and desultory but patient, and, in its own shuffling and partial fashion, invincible pursuit of moral ends. One might almost say that it exalts violence as a lordly and gallant accomplishment while it fosters Christianity with the hangdog and shamefaced persistence with which one practises an underhand vice.

This division of ideals, this fissure in the universe, is not remedied by the advance of civilization. Civilization, indeed, reverts fondly to the rude strength of the primitive instincts which its weakness idealizes. Its central scientific doctrine, the hypothesis of evolution, reveals in the cosmos a quite undivined subservience to the rule of physical health and energy. The successes of Napoleon and Bismarck reveal the tenacity of its ancient instincts; it finds dervishes like Nietzsche and even seers like Carlyle to uphold the sacredness of the gospel of force. Yet the claims of morality are undisplaced. It seems clear that the two elements are irreconcilable, and yet that their reconciliation is imperative in the final disposition which the perplexed human race shall make

of this unruly problem. We are confronted with two *intransigeants*, an Austria-Hungary, so to speak, two antagonists to be solidified into an empire.

The attitude of Emerson in this regard is singular and remarkable. That a man of no bodily force, of uncertain constitution, of retiring and unaggressive habits, committed by ancestral prescription and by individual preference to the doctrine of the unshared and unbounded supremacy of the moral sentiment, should have been able so far to circumvent his own limitations, to transcend his own hemisphere, as to sympathize with elemental and unchastened power is a fact that strikes the thoughtful beholder with an emotion not untinged with awe. That Emerson effected no logical adjustment of the claims of these antagonists is very clear and very natural; but their mere co-existence in a single mind discloses or at least suggests in that mind a share in the profundity of the universe.

There is another synthesis which is possibly only the foregoing synthesis surveyed from another point of view; but that point of view is so strongly marked and so weighty as to justify a separate exposition. The cosmic God is obviously a very different personage from the God whom man has expressed or distilled from his ethical meditations. The power that launches earthquakes and arms cuttle-fish has but meagre relation to the power that blesses infants and forgives enemies. Now in recent times the desire, even the need, of integrating the universe by the consolidation of these two powers has been increasingly felt by religious minds, and the divergence of the ideas has proved an obstacle to their

assimilation. An interesting if illogical expedient was found. The powers were amalgamated, but not the character, and the character of the ethical God in the milder and loftier forms of Christianity was transferred almost without change to the common representative of aboriginal force and Christian principle. The troublesome data were pushed aside or explained away; the facts might be authentic, but authoritative they were not; they must be dismissed as illusions or anomalies or coercions, as libellous in their consequence, however accurate in detail. It is clear that such a stand is unsafe if it be not cowardly. To take a further step, to assign unflinchingly to the universe the quality denoted by its own acts, to reconstruct the notion of Providence with a view of finding room in it for the rigors and barbarities which darken the annals of the world and yet to keep it the abiding and rightful object of the admiration and affection of mankind, here was a task which required that precise combination of benevolence, austerity, and courage for which Emerson was noteworthy.

That Emerson effected a *logical* combination of the two antagonistic ideas it would be puerile to imagine. The service he performed was psychological. He proved that the affection commonly granted to mildness could be rendered to severity, or rather to an association of severity and tenderness which might be defined in a single word as Dantesque. It is hardly too much to say that he found the sternness of the universe endearing. "The terrific benefactor" who is not to be dressed up in the "clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student in divinity" is an image that all but sets him in a glow.

Many men have rejoiced to find in a stern God the arm or weapon of their own vindictiveness, but the significant point in Emerson is the domestication and fraternization of this idea with the humane band of benignant and charitable sentiments.

Physically, Emerson was rather sound than strong, but the mark of his moral constitution was robustness, and robustness has its own standards of comfort and wellbeing which seem like anomalies and paradoxes to infirmity. To the relaxed natives of the emasculate tropics, it is beyond reason or conception that the sons of hardier climates should find content, even health, friendliness, and exhilaration, in the lowered temperature and frosty winds before which their imaginations shrink and crouch. Why is it impossible to believe that some future age, conscious of a deep love at the world's core, might learn to rejoice rather than repine at the failure of that love to express itself in the nerveless forms of anxious solicitude or fondling tenderness?

> "Plants and birds and humble creatures
> Well accept her rule austere;
> Titan-born, to hardy natures
> Cold is genial and dear."

It is conceivable that Emerson's attitude may turn out to be, not the delusion of a sanguine and credulous mind, but the prophecy of the final attitude of mankind after it has put aside both the vindictiveness and savagery of Calvinism and what may seem to its corrected and clarified vision the mawkishness and unctuousness of latter-day Christianity. The demonstration of these ideas is impracticable: they belong to the class of sug-

gestions and possibilities, to the source, in other words, of human nature's most penetrating and vivifying experience.

The mixture of plaintiveness and indignation with which Emerson's so-called optimism is received by cautious thinkers is a curious proof of the affectionate regard in which the human race holds its despondencies and discouragements. Who is this upstart who has presumed to think generously of life and his kind? One might suggest that it was creditable to our poor damaged universe to have been able to play the rôle of universal benefactor for one enlightened spirit without breaking down in the attempt. Is it necessary to deprive the cosmos of the rare honor of having justified itself to the mind and heart of one of the noblest and profoundest of its sons? If the optimism is peculiar, let us not forget that there is one class of peculiarities which the improvement of the race is destined to render universal.

The life of Emerson seems, in its way, to have foreshadowed the conditions under which it is probable that the maximum of happiness may be secured for human nature. Those conditions were humility, early stoicism, fortitude, the release from the selfish ambitions which divide and distract mankind, wide and eager curiosity, intense intellectual activity, preoccupation with the inward life, concentration on the present as the type of the eternal. If his field seems restricted and peculiar, we must not forget that his special task was to restore a general character to all specialties, to indicate certain inspirations and elevations to which occupations of

every class are permeable or porous. The minimization of pain and the concentration of desire on non-competitive benefits would seem in themselves to remove more than half of the visible obstacles to the amelioration of the status of the race.

Emerson's influence is a subject for discriminating study. The pointed and profound observations he dropped incidentally on miscellaneous subjects have been caught up eagerly by the saner public. His character as evinced in his books and in his life has been a high and salutary influence. What more are we to say? The frequent and not improbable assertion that his main office was stimulative or fertilizing includes, while it obscures, the half-reluctant acknowledgment that his major ideas as ideas have found no wide acceptance in the hearers of his own time or in their posterity. He did not seek disciples in the common sense, and the one phase of discipleship which would have been welcome — the establishment at his instance in other minds of *independent* centres of access to the divine power — has yet to prove its existence on a large scale to the critical student. The teaching was high, but the pupils were unripe. Emerson was in the position of a young man of twenty-three, who, in the manly elation of his first pecuniary independence, should urge self-support on audiences of boys varying from four to fourteen years. The advice would be manifestly impracticable, yet the self-support — so blindly yet so far-seeingly urged — might be the true ideal and eventual destiny of each one of the immature auditors. To make the analogy just for the actual influence of Emerson, we must put decades or centuries

instead of years, and let each boy stand for a suite of generations.

The illustration may be drawn upon for a second instructive particular. The supposition that parental support was withdrawn from these boys before their capacity for self-help had matured will suggest aptly enough the effect of the decease of puritanism on the minds naturally receptive of the Emersonian doctrine of self-reliance. The phenomenon called Emerson was composed of two elements, — the absorption of puritanism and the estrangement from puritanism. The duplication of the phenomenon depended on the transmission of the two constituents, but Emerson transmitted only the second. The old-time faith to which he had owed so much passed from maturity to decadence with tragic certainty and swiftness. A rhetorician would say that he was himself the occasion of the decline, that the plant perished in consequence of the effort it put forth in the creation of its flower. Putting aside such flourishes, it is clear that the followers were in no condition to forego the aid which had proved indispensable to the training of the master, that that aid was in fact withdrawn, and that Emerson himself was a visible occasion, if not in the last analysis, an active cause of its withdrawal.

The result has been very curious. Here was a man built to exert a rare influence upon a certain kind of highly sensitive and clarified human material. That material, almost in the course of his own lifetime, is virtually removed from the world, and removed by influences to which he himself was a conspicuous and

it may be, a powerful contributor. The effect of the teacher cannot be wholly balked, but it is forced to creep out through secondary outlets, to percolate through devious, underground, and casual ways, to take shape as chance suggestion, as moral impregnation, or as quickener and vitalizer in some mysterious fashion which it is easier to revere than to measure. The world adopts Emerson's sagacities, chants his verses, savors his pungencies, and reveres his character: meanwhile it ignores his philosophy: he is at the same time honored and forsaken.

The future, be it remembered, is intact. Emerson's *fame* arrived punctually, and shows no sign of diminution, but his influence, the influence of his central ideas and impulsions, has been curiously prorogued. A hiatus has occurred in the evolution of his power, springing out of an unreadiness on the world's part for the reception of his ideas which the last fifty years seem rather to have increased than abated. Humanity must receive a new and profound charge of the religious spirit before its real pupilage to the waiting master can begin. At the present instant he is hardly in the strong sense a teacher, hardly in the strong sense an example: he is a revelation of capacity, an adjourned hope, an unassured but momentous foreshadowing.

THE END

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